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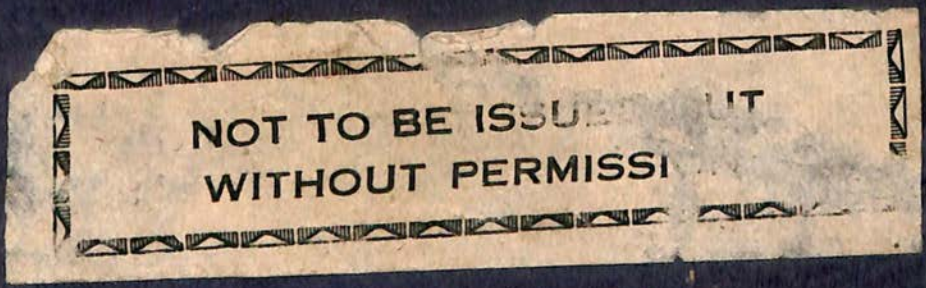
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AUTHORS AT WORK.

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BY

CHARLES PEBODY.

"I wish men would oftener write books to tell us what they READ, instead of what they THINK."—T. Moore.

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PREFACE.

It has often struck me that an artist with his wits about him, with a little imagination, a little industry, and perhaps a dash of genius, might distinguish himself on the walls of the Royal Academy, by sketching a few of our most popular authors at their desk. The thought has, I presume, often flashed through the minds of most people; for it is impossible to stand for a couple of seconds before Sir William Allan's picture of Sir Walter Scott in his library at Abbotsford, or of Burns, with the MS. of his *Cottar's Saturday Night* on his table, or even to look at Mr. Fildes' sketch of Dickens' vacant chair, without thinking what an interesting and picturesque gallery of portraits might be painted by any man who would put his heart into the work. Gibbon standing in the ruins of the Capitol, planning his History of the Decline and Fall of Rome; Sir Walter Scott turning up the tattered and soiled MS. of *Waverley* in an old cabinet with his fishing tackle, and running his eye through it afresh to see how it read; Dr. Johnson upon his three-legged stool in his Fleet Street garret, throwing off *Rasselas* to pay the expenses of his mother's funeral; Addison thinking out one of his

Spectators in the Long Gallery of Holland House, with a glass of sherry at each end to assist his thought; Coleridge and Wordsworth in the glen at Alfoxton laying down the plan of the *Ancient Mariner* to pay the expenses of a trip to Lynton; Cowper in his workshop at the bottom of the garden at Olney, with his hares at his feet, and the grass under his window all bespangled with dew-drops, the birds singing in the apple trees among the blossoms, and the MS. of the *Task* upon his plain wooden table; Sydney Smith dashing off one of his articles for the *Edinburgh Review,* at his antique desk in the window overlooking the lawn at Coombe Florey, with his girls at the piano trying one of Moore's songs; Macaulay reading a page of his History to Jeffrey after breakfast in the Albany; Dickens turning into Westminster Hall with the *New Monthly* in his hand, containing his first sketch by Boz, "because his eyes were not fit to be seen in the open daylight;" Thackeray, with the returned MS. of *Vanity Fair* in his hand, asking himself the question whether he should try one more publisher, or throw his copy into the fire at once and forswear authorship—how the pictures come clustering round the point of your pen, when you allow yourself to think how a suggestion of this kind might be worked out! I should not hesitate, I think, if I were an artist, to try my hand at a sketch of "the crooked little thing," who asked questions, translating the *Iliad* on the backs of

old letters or odd scraps of paper, or at Byron scribbling *Don Juan*, with a bottle of Hollands at his side and a pair of wax candles on his desk. A fine work of art could, I am convinced, be made out of a sketch of Milton listening to the suggestion of Elwood, the Quaker, that he might employ his genius to much better purpose in writing about *Paradise Regained*, than in telling the story of *Paradise Lost*. But this, I suppose, is all a vain dream. The pictures I am thinking of, the pictures that all of us think of in turn, as we run our eye through the pages of a favourite author, will never exist except in the imagination, and they will exist there as companions of those phantom works which Thackeray used to run off in his fancy as books which might have been written.

Perhaps in default of the pictures themselves, this volume of pen and ink sketches of Authors at Work, may not be without its interest to those who, like myself, long now and then, when they take up a book, to picture the writer to themselves in his library, to see and know him as his friends saw and knew him, to look over his MS., to read his proofs, and to chat with him over the fire about his bargain with his publishers.

Of course, if we were quite wise, and therefore a little less curious, we should be content to know these phantom companions of ours only as phantoms, to know the orator by his speech, the author by his

book, the artist by his picture; for in these we generally find them in their happiest moods, and most of our attempts to know them closer, to know them at their own firesides, end in disappointment and vexation. Here and there, perhaps, we may meet with a man who is as delightful over a bottle of claret or a cigar, as he is on his legs in the House of Commons, or in his novels or his poems. But these men are the exception not the rule. As a rule, men of genius are, as Pope said, only to be admired, not to be loved. The great wit may be very dull over a bottle of port. The great poet may be very prosy during a morning walk, and the epigrammatist, whose good things are in all mouths, may be a bit of a bore at a dinner-table. Anticipating a very pleasant *tête-à-tête*, Jeffrey once manœuvred to get a seat next to Talleyrand, only to find, however, that even Talleyrand, with a plate of soup before him, could be as quiet and commonplace as an alderman; and this, I suspect, is a very common experience. "Your great man is generally, after all, a dull dog." The only observation that the prince of critics could recollect the next morning of the prince of wits and diplomatists, was an interesting inquiry about cock-a-leekie—"Apropos de votre celèbre potage de cock-a-leekie, Mon. Jeffrey, faut-il le manger avec des prunes ou sans prunes?" The anecdote is characteristic. Yet this, after all, is only one of a thousand disappointments of the sort that will suggest themselves, for, except in moments of

rare exaltation, many men, even of the highest genius, are indistinguishable from the first half-dozen men you meet in a railway carriage or a smoking-room. Byron, to take a name that presents itself at once as the ideal of a man of genius, always repelled the notion that he was at all influenced by poetical associations, except when he had a pen in his hand and a bottle of Hollands on the table. "You must have been very highly gratified," said a gentleman to him, "by the classical remains and recollections which you met with in your visit to Ithaca." "You quite mistake me," answered Byron, "I have no poetical humbug about me. I am too old for that. Ideas of that sort are confined to rhyme." It was exactly the same with Scott. Moore once proposed to go and see Melrose Abbey, as Sir Walter recommends everyone to see it, by moonlight. "Pooh—pooh," said Scott, "you don't suppose I ever saw it by moonlight." Nor is this the only source of possible disappointment. The literary nature is not always made of porcelain. Now and then, indeed, it is hardly human. Byron had "no genius for friendship." Pope was irritable and malignant. Gray was a prig. Fielding was something worse. Burns was a compound of "dirt and deity." Milton had but one friend—a gloomy Quaker, with a taste for Greek. His first wife ran away from him before the honeymoon was over, disgusted with "his spare diet and hard study." Young, with all his sentiment, was a

false friend and a harsh father. Sterne only grew sentimental when he took up a pen. Madame de Staël was a bore of the first water. Erskine and Coleridge were intolerable when they got upon "Trial by Jury" or metaphysics. Curran was quite as much of a buffoon as a wit; and even Grattan now and then was apt to become very much like "a sentimental harlequin."

Yet knowing all this, as we do, of these men, and often much more, it is impossible not to feel the keenest personal interest in their lives, and in every trifle that speaks to us of them and of their habits of thought, of their hours of work, of all their ways! Their homes become to us as consecrated shrines. Their little ways and familiar phrases are often endeared to us, like the little ways and phrases of our wives and children; and any trifle that illustrates their character, any note that brings them nearer to us, is treasured up in our memory, as we treasure the mementos of friendship and affection, the lock of hair and the packet of faded letters. Perhaps in itself it is a matter of very little consequence to know that Dryden wore a black velvet coat, talked very little, ejaculated "Egad!" and took snuff constantly, that Gray wrote his Elegy with a crowquill, that Gibbon wrote three volumes of his History under the shade of an acacia overlooking the Lake of Geneva, and sent his first rough MSS. to the press without any intermediate copying—that Byron, after

reading Jeffrey's review of his youthful poems, sat down and drank three bottles of claret to his own share after dinner, took "a deep study of Milton," and then relieved his soul by writing his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.* Yet trifles like these often possess a distinct value of their own; and, after all, it is only by the light of this tittle-tattle of tradition that we can stroll along Fleet Street with Dr. Johnson to the Mitre Tavern, or to the Kit Cat to meet Burke, and Gibbon, and Goldsmith; spend half-an-hour with Cowper in his workshop; or walk down the High Street of Edinburgh with Professor Wilson to his class room, "with a book under his arm and a week's beard on his chin." Even with the help of hints like these, how pale, thin and ineffectual do many of our companions of the bookshelf stand out before us, when we ask ourselves what sort of men they were in the flesh, how they wrote, how they talked, how they dressed, what books they read, what sort of companions they were, whether they were better than the writings, or their writings better than their authors.

To say that this taste of ours is a petty taste, the taste of valets, is simply to inveigh against one of the instincts of our nature, the instinct which—to quote the words of Moore—"leads us to contemplate with pleasure a great mind in its undress, and to rejoice in the discovery, so consoling to human pride, that even the mightiest, in their moments of ease and

weakness resemble ourselves;" and, perhaps, I may add, to inveigh against one of the strongest charms of history and biography, against the charm without which all history and all biography are little more than "an old almanack." Perhaps it is not a very high taste. I do not say it is. But I may at least venture to say that it is not an unhealthy taste, and that it is a taste which has distinguished almost every man of genius. And what every man of genius in his "age of admiration," has taken an interest in ascertaining about his own contemporaries and rivals, we, to whom these men are all alike friends and companions, may in our turn, I hope, indulge as legitimately as they did themselves.

This, at all events, is the hypothesis upon which I have acted in writing these sketches of *Authors at Work*, and the reception which most of them have met with, even in an abbreviated form, in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, leads me to hope that in this shape they will be thought worthy of a place on the library shelves, below the works of the great men whom I have tried to portray at their desks: to be taken down now and then for a hasty glimpse at Scott, and Byron, and Moore, and Lamb, with a pen in their hands, and with their MSS. or proofs before them, when the original lives of these men would perhaps be a bit of a bore.

This is the only purpose I have had in view in writing these sketches. I have often, after reading

a favourite poem or novel, asked myself how, and when, and where it was written; and in hunting up the answers to these questions, I have collected a mass of personal chit-chat and anecdote which cannot fail, I believe, to be as interesting to everyone else as it was originally to me. All I have done, or attempted to do, in this volume, is to put this chit-chat together in a presentable form; and if these sketches serve no other purpose, they will at least save the ordinary reader of Scott and Lamb, the hours of labour which are implied in looking through Lockhart and Talfourd, for the information which I assume every reader instinctively wishes to have at his fingers' ends when he takes up *Waverley* and *Marmion* or the *Essays of Elia*.

AUTHORS AT WORK.

FRANCIS JEFFREY.

IN the Ides of March, 1802, a group of young men, hardly for the most part out of their cricketing days, happened to meet together one evening in the chambers of a Scotch barrister, on the eighth or ninth flat of a house in Buccleugh Place, Edinburgh, to talk of poetry, metaphysics, and politics, over their Bohea. They were all men of rare endowments, men of wit, of eloquence, of high spirit, and of ambition equal at least to their accomplishments. Except, however, in their own estimation of themselves, they were none of them particularly distinguished, unless, perhaps, it may be, as the heroes of those oyster-supper parties which then formed one of the pleasantest traits in the social life of the Athens of the North, where men met to eat and drink, to argue and joke, and to indulge now and then in one of the rarest privileges of friendship, by sitting still as stupid listeners. They had hardly a hundred pounds in hard cash between

them, and I doubt whether they possessed sufficient credit to raise that sum on their joint note of hand. "I see no prospect," said the owner of the room, speaking with the frankness of friendship, "but that of dying the death of other great geniuses—by hunger." And he was one of the seniors of the party, a thin, spare man of thirty, with keen, sharply-cut features, dark bushy hair, and sparkling black eyes, in physique not much bigger than an Aztec, but with an intellect of almost preternatural acuteness, a fluent tongue, well practised in the art of conversation, as the art of conversation was then understood in the metaphysical circles of Edinburgh, and possessing, as he thought, a turn for epic poetry. This was Francis Jeffrey; and Francis Jeffrey was just now at the very lowest ebb of fortune. He had swept the hall of the Court of Session in the wig and gown of one of the *noblesse de la robe* for seven years, without picking up sufficient fees to stock his office with law books. He had tried his hand in authorship, at poetry, at law, at criticism, and had come to the conclusion that, with great powers of industry, he possessed no special qualification for anything. He had even failed in an attempt to establish himself as a newspaper grub in London, under the auspices of a man to whom every son of the North with a turn for metaphysics or politics generally offered his pen, Perry, the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle;* and returning to Edinburgh, to take his chance of picking

up 200 guineas a-year as a law reporter at the Bar, he had married a girl without a shilling in the world, and was now talking of studying Sanscrit, and reading up Oriental literature in order to seek his fortune in that El Dorado of briefless barristers and old maids who had lost their chances of the coif and matrimony at home, the capital of Bombay. His companions were at least looking a little higher than this. The horse-hair and ermine of the Lord Chancellor formed the illusion of one; and the lawn sleeves and shovel hat of an English Bishop, with a palace and £10,000 a-year, that of another. But even these buoyant and ambitious spirits were neither of them men of high birth, of fortune, or of influential connexions, and, like Jeffrey, were dependent upon themselves, upon their own wit and energy, for any honours that might be in store for them. All the qualities, however, that were needed for success in life Sydney Smith and Henry Brougham possessed in the highest measure; and when Smith, in the hardy spirit which more or less animated all of them, threw out his suggestion that they should set up a Review, even Horner did not deprecate what he, like all the rest, must nevertheless have felt to be an experiment full of risk. Brougham, with characteristic impetuosity at once, as he tells us in his Autobiography, entered warmly into the scheme. "Jeffrey, by nature always rather timid, was full of doubts and fears. It required all Smith's overpowering vivacity to argue and laugh

Jeffrey out of his difficulties. There would, he said, be no lack of contributors. There was himself, ready to write any number of articles, and to edit the whole; there was Jeffrey, *facile princeps* in all kinds of literature; there was Brougham, full of mathematics, and everything relating to colonies; there was Horner for political economy; Murray for general subjects; besides might they not, from their great and never-to-be-doubted success, fairly hope to receive help from such leviathans as Playfair, Dugald Stewart, Robison, Thomas Brown, Thomson and others? "All this was irresistible." The proposal was agreed to by acclamation. Smith volunteered to edit the first number, and as Editor was at once commissioned to look out for a publisher.

This—I need hardly add—was the origin of the *Edinburgh Review*. It is an old story. But often as it has been told by Smith, by Jeffrey, and by Brougham, it is a story that can never pall in the telling, for it represents one of those incidents in the history of literature over which the imagination loves to linger, and, lingering, to scan in all its detail.

You take up the first volume of the *Edinburgh Review*, run your eye over its title-page and its modest preface, and at once reproduce in your mind's eye, by a sort of enchantment, that scene in Buccleugh Place. There is Jeffrey's plainly-furnished study, fitted up complete for £7 10*s*. There are his books and papers scattered about on

his desk, two or three old briefs, returned MSS., and a copy of the *Monthly Review*, containing his first published contribution, on Whiter's "Etymologicon Magnum;" and there, round his hearth, are three or four of the most active and powerful intellects in the three kingdoms—Brougham, as yet, perhaps, only half conscious of his gigantic energies, but panting to do something to distinguish himself; Sydney Smith, with his jovial, beaming countenance, and his restless grey eye sparkling with wit, the only man in the group, as he used to boast, with any plausible pretensions to good looks; and Horner, the knight of the shaggy eyebrows, with the Ten Commandments, as Sydney Smith used to say, all written in the lines of his face as legibly as they were on the tables of stone. It was a tempestuous night, and one can still hear the echo of the laugh over Smith's prediction, that they were brewing a far stronger storm in Jeffrey's garret. "What terms are we to offer the publisher?" "What motto shall we adopt?" "What is to be the size of the *Review?*" were some of the first questions that had to be turned over; and they were all disposed of in an off-hand manner. Smith, of course, suggested that they should take as their motto, "*Tenui Musam meditamur avenâ*"—We cultivate literature on a little oatmeal! But this, as they all acknowledged, was too near the truth to be admitted; and Horner took up a copy of "Publius Syrus" that happened to lie on the table, turned

over the leaves, of which none of them had read a syllable, and hit upon the sentence that still adorns the covers of the old buff and blue—"*Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur!*" This, as Brougham tells us, Horner thought far better than Smith's oatmeal suggestion; and the Editor was overruled. Of course it was easier to find a motto than a publisher. They offered the whole of the first year's numbers to Constable as a present if he would take all the risks of printing and publishing. Considering the spirit of the writers, and the state of the law at that time, these risks were not then the trifles that they are now. But the Prince of Publishers closed with the offer, and the Reviewers set to work with their pens.

Except Jeffrey, none of these Edinburgh Reviewers had, I believe, written a line beyond their college exercises; and all that Jeffrey had published had been one or two trifling bits of criticism in the *Monthly Review*. But Jeffrey set to work with his task like a practised athlete. It was just the sort of work that his previous training and course of reading had qualified him to shine in. He had been a critic from his cradle. He possessed a fluent and vigorous pen, an intellect teeming with arguments and illustrations upon almost every possible topic of literary and metaphysical discussion, and the most intensely critical spirit that perhaps ever animated a man of letters. Even when a mere boy at Glasgow University, Jeffrey had distinguished himself in the

Historical and Critical Clubs by his fluency and acuteness; and when an essay of Principal Haldane's once fell into his hands for analysis, he dissected it with a precocious keenness and severity that startled his professor. The critical powers which were thus early brought into play were developed by the most intense and systematic course of mental exercise that a man of genius ever put himself through. He analysed and criticised every book he read, every lecture he attended at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Oxford, the professors, and their theories and styles, his own poems, essays, and translations; and, to crown all, he generally finished up by criticising, in the sharpest terms, his own criticisms. Most of these MSS. have been preserved; and, knowing what a hornet's nest Jeffrey brought about his ears as the Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, it is curious to look through them. and see how he anticipated his censures, upon the Lake Poets, for instance, by his criticism upon his own work. "I do not like this piece," he says of one of his essays on Poetry; "but of which of my productions can I not say the same? Here, however, it is said with peculiar energy. The style is glaringly unequal; affectedly plain in the beginning, oratorical in the end. The design is not one, and I am afraid the sentiments are not consistent." "This barbarous version of the elegant Racine," he says of another piece, "I feel myself bound to stigmatise with its genuine character, that

as often as the proofs of my stupidity, displayed on the foregoing pages, shall mortify my pride, I may be comforted by the instance of candour set forth on this." He compiles an epitome of Lucretius, reads it, and pronounces it "a very disgraceful performance." "The poetic beauties of the original are entirely lost." He sketched out a speech on the Slave Trade, on the model of Demosthenes. "On the model of Demosthenes!" he says with a sneer, at the close of his work. "Admirably executed! I wonder which of the characteristics of that orator I had it in my mind to imitate while I covered these pages! There can hardly be anything more unlike the style, though at times it is evident I have been jumping at that too; and the solicitude with which I have avoided special narrative and individual illustration is still more inconsistent with the instant peculiarity of that model. Now I knew all this when I avowed my intention of imitation. What was it, then, that I designed to imitate? That perspicuity and simplicity of arrangement, that direct and unremitting tendency to the single object of the discourse, that naked and undisguised sincerity of sentiment, that perpetual recurrence to acknowledged and important positions, which are, certainly, the most intrinsic and infallible marks of the orations of Demosthenes. No intermission of argument, no digressive embellishment, no ostentatious collocation of parts, no artificial introduction, no rhetorical transition is

to be found in the pages of this accomplished and animated orator. He falls from argument to argument with the most direct and unaffected simplicity; and at every transition from argument to exhortation, and from exhortation to reproach, he holds the one object of his discourse fully in his own eyes, and in those of his auditors. This I say by way of self-defence, that I may not be thought to have mistaken the character of this writer, whom my imitation evinces me to have understood so ill. In one respect it is similar to my model—it is sincere, and has not declined any part of the argument that occurred. Towards the end it is most defective: the turgid breaking in upon one unawares. I never read ten pages on the question in my life. I pretend, therefore, that this is original." This is the very style of the Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, an anticipation of the tone that marked some of the most exasperating of his criticisms.

Of course the object of all these exercises, of all this self-analysis, was to acquire accuracy of thought, and ease and readiness of expression. And they served their purpose with remarkable success. The quickness of Jeffrey's perception, the rapidity of his thought, the fluency and flexibility of his tongue and his pen, were the marvel of his friends. They were like those of an improvisatore. "He seemed to invent arguments, and to pour out views, and to arrive at conclusions instinctively." These, of

course, were the very qualities that were needed for the work, and especially in the case of men circumstanced as the original band of Edinburgh Reviewers were, with nothing but the scraps of their time to devote to criticism; and Horner, the sagacious Horner, at once saw that if any of them were destined to derive honour from the *Review*, Jeffrey was the man. "The genius of that little man," he said, with characteristic generosity, "remained almost unknown to all but his most intimate acquaintances. His manner is not, at first, pleasing; what is worse, it is of that cast which almost irresistibly impresses upon strangers the idea of levity and superficial talents. Yet there is not any man whose real character is so much the reverse. He has, indeed, a very sportive and playful fancy; but it is accompanied with an extensive and varied information, with a readiness of apprehension almost intuitive, with judicious and calm discernment, with a profound and penetrating understanding."

Yet, of all the Edinburgh Reviewers, no one in the first instance seems to have thought less of the prospects of the *Review* than the critic by whose genius it was, in the course of a few years, to be developed into the most brilliant and powerful representative of the Fourth Estate. His only anxiety was to drag through the first year, in order to relieve themselves of the bond they had entered into with Constable. He harps upon this point in his letters all through

the year. "I have completely abandoned the idea of taking a permanent share in the publication," he says, writing in June, 1802; "and shall probably desert after fulfilling my engagements, which only extend to a certain contribution for the first four numbers. I suspect that the work itself will not have a much longer life. I believe we shall come out in October, and have no sort of doubt of making a respectable appearance, though we may not, perhaps, either obtain popularity or deserve it."

How the original band of Edinburgh Reviewers, strengthened with two or three recruits—Murray, Thomson, Seymour, and Playfair, for instance—met together during the first year in a dingy room off Willison's printing-office, in Craig's Close, with Sydney Smith in the chair, to read the proofs of their own articles, compare notes, and allot books, to criticise each other all round, and to sit in judgment on the few MSS. that were then offered by outsiders, I need not say; nor how Smith insisted, probably with a twinkle in his eye and an expression of well-feigned horror, that they should all repair to this dark divan, like a band of conspirators, singly and by back lanes, in order to throw off suspicion, and to preserve that incognito without which, as he professed to believe, it was impossible for them to go on a single day. These gatherings have been commemorated by a more graphic pen than mine; and Sydney Smith used to tell how he and Brougham sat

down together over a glass of whiskey to tickle up their authors. "Once I remember how we got hold of a little vegetarian, who had put out a silly little book; and how Brougham and I sat one night over our review of that book, looking whether there was a chink or a crevice through which we could filter one more drop of verjuice." It is a characteristic anecdote. This was the spirit of all the Edinburgh Reviewers.

The first number of the *Review* made its appearance on the 10th of October, 1802; and this date is worth noting, for it marks in white chalk the commencement of one of the most prolific and brilliant periods in the history of English literature. In itself the year 1802 represents one of the dreariest periods in our history, the period of Castlereagh and of Addington. Politics had been reduced to a mere system of Police; and the Government of the country was principally carried on under the compendious method of the Six Acts. Cobbett was in America —Leigh Hunt was in prison. Literature was upon its lees. Hume, Gibbon, Richardson, Cowper, Burns, all the poets, historians, novelists, and critics who had been distinguished by their genius ten or fifteen years before were either in their graves or if still alive were lingering on simply as drivellers and shows. These men had, between them, given a fresh turn to the thought and style of our literature; but none of them had acquired that ascendancy in

matters of taste and style which Pope and Addison exercised in their day, and which has since been exercised by Scott, and Wordsworth, and Byron. They founded no schools. They left no successors. Their appearance was like the false dawn of an Indian summer. It was followed by intense darkness. A period of utter lifelessness supervened upon a period of silvered mediocrities. At the close of the century the first man of letters north of the Tweed was a sort of philosophical fribble—Henry Mackenzie, the author of the "Man of Feeling." His companion in poetry was Joanna Baillie. Crabbe and Bowles were the English counterparts of these brilliant northern lights. Here and there, of course, a few men of original genius were rising to the surface; but, in 1802, the authors of "Marmion," of "Christabel," of "The Excursion," of "Roderick Random," of "Lalla Rookh," of "The Pleasures of Memory," and "The Pleasures of Hope," were known only by the first trifles of their genius. Scott had published his "Minstrelsy," Wordsworth his first volume of "Ballads," Coleridge his "Ancient Mariner," Southey his "Thalaba." But that was all. Scott had not yet written a line of his "Lay," in the form in which we now have it, although, at the request of Lady Dalkeith, he had been turning over in his mind a few verses of "a border ballad in the comic style," to preserve a ghost story which she had heard over the yule log. Cole-

ridge was translating "Wallenstein" and writing squibs for the *Morning Post.* Southey was still puzzling out the mysteries of "Coke upon Littleton," as a preparation for the bar. Lamb was trying his hand at his first farce, in a garret in Chancery Lane. Wordsworth, after years of hesitation, had just made up his mind to make a poet's work the profession of his life, taken a cottage at Grasmere, thrown off a few sonnets, and planned the prelude to his great work, in the course of his morning strolls on the banks of the Derwent. Byron had made his first dash into poetry, under the influence of his passion for his cousin; but he was still "a wild mountain colt" at Harrow. Moore was in the first flush of his popularity as the author of "Anacreon," dancing like a page at the heels of Lord Moira, writing songs in the morning in a single room up two pair of stairs in a street off Portman Square, reading for the Bar, and singing songs after supper at Carlton House to the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Fitzherbert. Shelley was at Harrow; Carlyle was spelling out his first lessons in Greek in an old Scottish manse; and Macaulay, Dickens, Thackeray, Disraeli, and Bulwer Lytton were hardly as yet out of their cradles. All the highest intelligence of the country, all its culture, all its thought, all its wit, were to be found in the House of Commons; and perhaps at no period, except the present, has the House of Commons possessed a brighter con-

stellation of statesmen, orators, and wits, than it did then. Outside the House of Commons there was not a single political writer of the slightest mark. The *Times* as yet was hardly known, except as a sheet of gossip and advertisements. The *Morning Post* was principally distinguished by its *jeux d'esprit* upon the foibles of the day. The *Chronicle* was rising into note by its Parliamentary reports. But free and independent criticism on the political topics of the day was not yet thought of. And these were the only newspapers of the slightest political or literary influence within the four seas. The provincial press was voiceless. The reviews were tame and spiritless to a degree which is now almost beyond conception. *The Gentleman* still preserved some sparks of the spirit that distinguished it in the days of Johnson and Cave; but its rivals did not possess even this. They were the organs of the booksellers, and they puffed or sneered at rival publications all round as they were ordered. In the midst of this expanse of sand and scrub, the *Edinburgh Review* shot up like one of those majestic palms which give a touch of preternatural beauty to the deserts of South America. The effect was magical; and its publication is the first distinct sign of the revival of the literary and political life of the nation—the first streak of light in the dawn of a long and brilliant day.

Taking up this number of the *Edinburgh Review*

now, your first feeling is a sensation of surprise that anyone should have done anything but go to sleep over it. The articles which form the staple of the number are very long, and, to tell the truth, not particularly marked by any of those vivacities of style that afterwards distinguished the *Edinburgh Review*. A criticism on "Mounier," from the pen of Jeffrey, stands first: that covers seventeen pages. Horner takes up twenty-eight pages with an analysis of Thornton's work on "Paper Credit." Brougham discusses the "Crisis of the Sugar Colonies," and takes twenty-two pages to do it. There is, too, a long and bitter review of "Thalaba," from the pen of Jeffrey, chiefly interesting as the first note of war against the Lakers and their poetry. The most readable articles are from the pen of Sydney Smith. You may generally trace his fine Roman hand in the first two or three sentences; and his contributions are light, racy, and off-hand. A tone of saucy insolence is, however, the distinguishing mark of the contributions. There is, of course, a tone of cleverness about the *Review*, and, here and there, you come across a slashing page of criticism. But, contrasting the haughty declaration of the Reviewers in the preface—that they intend to notice only those works which possess a permanent interest, and to discuss the principles of these rather than their style,—one wonders why they should condescend to hunt the small deer which, every now and then, are started

for a run of four or five pages, and sometimes even for a scramble of a page and a half. The *Spectator* and *Saturday Review* now contain in a single number more thought, more wit, and more criticism on politics and literature that is worth reading a second time than the whole of the first volume of the *Edinburgh Review*.

It is right, however, to add that the first number was written entirely by the projectors themselves—written, that is, by men who had taken up the work of criticism more in sport than anything else; that, with a single exception, they were all novices at the work, and that their contributions were thrown off in those intervals of leisure which tutors and barristers could steal from college rooms and courts of law. The first number contained in all twenty-one articles: seven from Smith's pen, five each from Jeffrey's and Brougham's, and four from Horner's.

What the circulation of these numbers of the *Review* was I cannot say; for booksellers are not in the habit of publishing their own autobiographies, and the accounts of the *Edinburgh Review* are still locked up in the archives of the house of Constable. At the date of its highest popularity, in 1814, Jeffrey, in a note to Tom Moore, sets down the circulation at 13,000 copies, and "we may reckon, I suppose, modestly, upon three or four readers of the popular articles in each copy." It is plain, however, from the tenour of Constable's correspondence, that the *Re-*

view, during its first year, brought more fame to its publisher than profit; for, though one of the most enterprising of publishers—a publisher who never hesitated for a moment upon projects that promised the slightest margin of profit, even Constable hesitated about continuing the *Edinburgh Review* beyond the term of his original engagement. He consulted Smith, and Smith's answer was emphatic and business-like. "If you will give 200*l.* per annum to your Editor, and ten guineas a sheet, you will soon have the best *Review* in Europe." Constable submitted this note to Longman. He pronounced the terms to be beyond all precedent; but they were the only terms upon which Smith thought it possible to secure the pens of the original band in the permanent service of the *Review*, and Constable yielded to his suggestion. In five years the *Edinburgh Review* was the first in Europe, its Editor the most powerful man of letters within the four seas, its staff of writers the flower of English intellect and English wit, and its proprietor the prince of publishers.

At the commencement of the second year Jeffrey was installed as Editor with a fee of £50 a number, and the scale of pay fixed at ten guineas a sheet. This, at the time, was thought very handsome. It represents now only the scale of second-rate publications. *St. Paul's*, and *Macmillan*, and the *Cornhill* pay a guinea a page. Even publications like *Chambers's Journal* pay 15s. a column. Dickens's

rate in *All the Year Round,* I believe, was like that of the *Cornhill,* a guinea a column. The *Times* varies in its payment for reviews from 50s. a column to £5. But it has frequently, it is said, paid as much as ten guineas for an article; and five guineas is the usual fee for leaders. The average scale for contributions with most of its contemporaries rarely, however, runs beyond two guineas an article. One guinea was the scale of the *Star,* and that is still, I believe, the scale upon two or three other papers. But this is thought poor. At the outset of the century, however, men like Scott and Southey, Coleridge and Hazlitt, Lockhart and Lamb, thought ten guineas a sheet of sixteen pages worth working for; and that for several years was the scale of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly.* Charles Dickens offered his first Sketches by Boz to the Editor of the *New Monthly* at 10s. a page; and this was the amount that Thackeray received for most of his early contributions to *Fraser.* The *Westminster* was, I believe, the first to raise the amount. Sir John Bowring fixed the minimum pay of his staff at sixteen guineas a sheet. This was the rate, too, of the *London Magazine* and of the *New Monthly,* I believe, under the editorship of Lord Lytton. In both cases, however, special rates were paid to writers of acknowledged reputation, Charles Lamb, for instance, drawing a guinea and a half a page for his "Essays of Elia." Except during the first three

or four years, however, the ten-guinea scale of the *Edinburgh* was not very closely adhered to. Practically, Jeffrey held a *carte blanche* as to payment; and he exercised his privilege pretty freely, paying for special contributions even as much as thirty guineas a sheet. This was the fee that he offered Tom Moore for an article like the one on Aristophanes which had recently appeared in the *Quarterly*, and had made a bit of a sensation—"thirty guineas a sheet and probably a good deal more." Macaulay, it is said, often received fifty guineas a sheet for his articles. But till the establishment of the *Quarterly*, 20 guineas was the regular allowance to contributors of the first order, to the Smiths and Brougliams and Murrays of the *Review*. Twenty and twenty-five guineas was the rate in nearly every case after the establishment of the *Quarterly*, and Jeffrey estimates that the cost of the whole number to the publishers, during the greater gart of his editorship, was not less than twenty-five guineas a sheet. His own fee as Editor after the first five or six years was £700 a year; but by using his pen he could easily run this up to £1,000, and generally did. He had power to draw for £2,800 a year for contributions, that is, for £700 a number.

Even at this high rate of pay, however, Jeffrey did not find it easy work to keep his original staff together at their work as a regular task. Their ambition was not to play the mere part of sharp-

shooters in the political contests of the day. They aspired to figure in the front ranks of the combatants; and before the *Review* had been in existence a couple of years, Jeffrey found himself alone in Edinburgh, the solitary representative of the original band of Reviewers. This was the most trying period of his editorship. Here is an illustration of the sort of perplexities he not unfrequently found himself in. He is writing to dun Horner for his contribution. "I have some right to dun, too," he says, "not merely because I am the master, to whom your service is due, but because I have myself sent *fifty* pages to the press before I ask you for one. Hear, now, our state, and consider: Brown has been dying with influenza, and is forbidden to write for his chest's sake. De Puis is dying with asthma, and is forbidden to write for his life's sake. Brougham is roaming the streets with the sons of Belial, or correcting his colonial proofs, and trusting everything to the exertions of the last week, and the contributions of the unfledged goslings who gabble under his wings. Elmsley—even the sage and staid Elmsley—has solicited to be set free from his engagements. And Timothy refuses to come under any engagements, with the greatest candour and good nature in the world." Smith and Horner professed to meet in London on the first of every month to go through the publishers' lists, and to select the books they thought fit to review, keep what they could deal with,

themselves, and to send the rest to Edinburgh to be apportioned out by the Editor. But neither of them was to be depended on. "Horner," says Smith, "is a sort of literary tiger, whose den is strewed with ten times more victims than he can devour;" and Smith, after keeping back books, was quite as likely as Horner to send an apology instead of his MS. Now and then the crack men of the *Review* struck all round; and the number for January, 1805, was got out "without any assistance from Horner, Brougham, Smith, Brown, Allen, Thomson, or any other of those gallant supporters who voted their blood and treasure for its assistance."

The Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, however, was not the man to crane even at difficulties like these. An editor to be worth his salt, must be prepared, like a parliamentary leader, to write and talk upon any subject at a moment's notice, to find himself in perplexities, to see his favourite bolt at the last moment, to see his best hands throw down their pens, put on their hats, and walk off in the middle of an article, and yet to keep his head and his temper cool, fill up gaps in his ranks, cover retreats, and put the best face upon everything. And, perhaps, no man was ever better fitted for a post of this description than Francis Jeffrey. He was the *beau ideal* of an able Editor. He could turn his hand to everything; take up a volume of English poetry, of German fiction, of French memoirs, or Scotch metaphysics, "cut the

leaves and smell the paper knife," and throw off a light and sparkling review in the course of a few hours; revise a heavy article upon science or philosophy, and, by a touch of his pen here and there, an interpolation or an erasure, give it an air of liveliness as well as of learning—see into the heart of a discussion at a glance, and suck the brains of all his contributors like oranges. Possessing an audacity almost equal to Brougham's, an intellectual dexterity which imposed upon most people like the sleight of hand of an Indian conjuror, diversified culture, a light and vivacious fancy, a fluent and vigorous pen, he knew all the arguments and sophisms upon every topic of thought and conversation, hit upon plagiarisms, misquotations, and false theories in a book by a kind of instinct, and was prepared, in the plentitude of his egotism, to discuss astronomy with Herschel, chemistry with Playfair and Young, metaphysics with Dugald Stewart, the principles of taste with Alison or Madame de Staël, and English jurisprudence with the profoundest lawyers in Westminster Hall, in a style, perhaps, a trifle too flashy and superficial for serjeants-at-law and fellows of the Royal Society, but in an easy, off-hand, and sparkling style that made the discussion pleasant and suggestive to people who only took up the *Review* to kill an hour after dinner. Sydney Smith caricatured Jeffrey's style with his usual point and wit. "Hang the solar system! bad light—planets too distant—pestered

with comets—feeble contrivance; could make a better with great ease."

All that Jeffrey wanted, Smith used to say, to make him the most charming of men, was a semblance of modesty. And that was the impression he left upon most people. Omniscience was his foible. He was too clever, too off-hand, too apt to contradict people upon matters that he knew nothing at all about. Of his wit, of his eloquence, of his humour, of his thought, no one ever speaks. His cleverness is what everyone harps upon. Mackintosh thought him the cleverest man he had ever met; and that is the highest eulogium I have ever yet met with upon Jeffrey. No one ever rises beyond that point in their admiration. Lawyers sneered at his law. Poets pooh-poohed his canons of criticism. Southey thought his notions of taste contemptible. "He is a mere child upon that subject; I never met a man," he says, "whom it was so easy to check-mate." You may trace blunders by the score in most of his articles as they originally appeared. Yet it was impossible to take the conceit out of the man, or, to use Smith's phrase, to alarm him into the semblance of modesty; and Cockburn's remark on Southey's criticism is very characteristic. Of course he pooh-poohs the suggestion that his hero was a child upon questions of taste or anything else; and, as to the notion of check-mating Jeffrey, he says that was simply impossible. He was as superior to trifles of that kind as the

Emperor Sigismund was to the rules of grammar. "He was much more likely to have played on in spite of the check, or to have prevented his antagonist from seeing that it had been given." That sentence gives us the key to the whole of the man's character. It is a sort of biographical anagram.

Of course, these were qualities that won for Jeffrey a species of cold admiration, an admiration that was generally thought to be adequately expressed by that odious and equivocal term cleverness. They were not qualities to excite either sympathy or friendship, or, I might add, to make him one of the most agreeable of companions. *Tête-à-tête* now and then, or at a quiet dinner with Scott or Smith, Jeffrey could be pleasant enough; and Lockhart, in his "Life of Scott," gives us a glimpse of the Editor of the *Edinburgh* and of his talk at a dinner-table. It is from the pen of an English gentleman, a member of the House of Commons, a man of culture, and a friend of Scott and Jeffrey alike. He happened to visit Edinburgh shortly after the article on "Marmion" appeared. The party was small. Scott and Jeffrey were the only lions; and they were both in full force. "A thousand subjects of literature, antiquities, and manners were started; and much was I struck, as you may well suppose, by the extent, correctness, discrimination, and accuracy of Jeffrey's information; equally so with his taste, acuteness, and wit in dissecting every book, author, and story that came in

our way. Nothing could surpass the variety of his knowledge, but the easy rapidity of his manner of producing it. He was then in his meridian. Scott delighted to draw him out, delighted, also, to talk himself, and displayed, I think, even a larger range of anecdote and illustration, remembering everything, whether true or false, that was characteristic or impressive; everything that was good, or lovely, or lively. It struck me that there was this great difference—Jeffrey, for the most part, entertained us, when books were under discussion, with the detection of faults, blunders and absurdities, or plagiarisms; Scott took up the matter where he left it, recalled some compensating beauty or excellence for which no credit had been allowed, and, by the recitation, perhaps, of one fine stanza, set the poor victim on his legs again." And what Jeffrey was over a glass of wine he was at his desk. He was a critic to the tips of his fingers.

But with all his faults, and these were, I believe, the principal—want of breadth and want of generosity —Jeffrey was beyond comparison the most adroit and able Editor that has yet sat in the chair of the *Edinburgh Review*. It was this belief of his in his own omniscience, this superabundant confidence in his own powers, this cold, critical temperament, this audacity and conceit, this glibness of tongue and pen, this power of playing on even after his check, that made Jeffrey what Jeffrey was. A man of more

readth, of more generous instincts, might have been much out of place in the chair of the *Edinburgh Review* as Charles Dickens in the chair of the *Daily News*. A man of less versatility and less fluency could not have sat down and thrown off a light and readable review of a Waverley novel, a volume of Wordsworth's poetry, or a philosophical treatise of Madame de Staël, in an hour or two stolen from his sleep, or his briefs, at the close of a day's work in the Court of Session. Yet this was what Jeffrey often did. "I am in a constant state of hurry and agitation," he says in one of his letters to Horner; "I have had reviews to write, and felons to defend, visits to pay, and journeys to perform, directions to give, and quarrels to make up—and all this without one interval of domestic tranquillity; but under strange roofs, where paper and pens were often as hard to be met as leisure and solitude were always." And as his practice at the bar increased, you find him frequently talking of having written this and that article with the printer's devil at the door, or when the *Review* ought to be at press; for though he was in the habit of writing, on an average, two or three articles in every number of the *Review*, he never permitted the work of the *Review* to interfere with his business. The law was his profession, not letters; and with his volume of contributions before us, it is a little amusing to note how finically he guards himself in his correspondence against the suspicion of

doing anything that can bear a tradesmanlike complexion. "I confine myself strictly," he says, "to intercourse with gentlemen only, even as contributors." "If I chose to give myself up to the magazine, I could make a lot of money; but I prefer to make less at the bar than to abandon my profession, even though I make it with less personal pleasure." You may trace this affectation even in his style. There is a sort of cavalier air about it. It is the off-hand style of a keen and vigorous master of English who has a horror of being thought a professional man of letters. "Jeffrey always seems to me," said Mackintosh, after reading one of his articles, "as if he were ashamed of being caught in eloquence, and wished to escape the disgrace by slovenliness."

Of course Jeffrey's best articles were not written with this haste and carelessness at the fag end of a day spent in defending a tippling minister of the Kirk, at the bar of the General Assembly, or a sheep stealer in the Court of Session. They were written in the leisure of his legal vacations at Hatton or at Craigcrook. Yet it is surprising how little difference there is between Jeffrey's best and his second best work, between that which was thrown off in haste, and that which was thought out under the trees on the hill-side at Hatton, or on the lawn overlooking the peaks of Arran, at Craigcrook. All his writing is critical; and in writing, as in conversation, it was

the flaws of a book, its plagiarisms, its faults of style, its false logic, or its weak parts, that Jeffrey fastened upon. These he twists and turns about with keenness and vivacity, and frequently with severity that is hardly distinguishable from brutality; but there is a conversational tone about his style. It is the style of a man turning over a book, quizzing a high-flown sentiment here, a flight of tawdry eloquence there, contrasting the theory of one writer with that of another, and throwing in observations of his own now and then, in answer to the interlocutory criticism of a companion. There is no attempt at polish or elaboration in any of his articles. They are simply the writings of a man with keen powers of observation and a fluent pen. Jeffrey never starts any views of his own, and works them out as Macaulay does. Except in one or two articles,—in those, for instance, on Alison and Madame de Staël,—he never attemps to go into the principles of a question. He thinks it quite enough to skim the surface of a discussion; and he is generally happiest when he gets into a vein of vituperation. His collected writings do not form more than a third of his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review,* but it is no exaggeration, I believe, to say that all Jeffrey's reviews put together are not worth one of the best of Macaulay's,—that, say, on Bacon, or on Warren Hastings.

Of Jeffrey's habits of work we do not know much. But what we do know is characteristic of the man.

He never took up his pen till the candles were lit and, like Sheridan, and Byron, and Charles Lamb he did most of his work in those fatal hours of inspiration from ten at night till two or three o'clock in the morning. Adopted originally, perhaps, from the exigencies of his profession, Jeffrey continued these habits of study and of work all through his life; and the only disagreeable incident attending his elevation to the bench was, at least in his own estimation, the hard necessity it imposed upon him of breakfasting now and then at eight o'clock in the morning.

His manuscript was inexpressibly vile; for he wrote with great haste, wrote, that is, as most men do whose thoughts outrun their pens, generally used a wretched pen, for he could never cut a quill, and altered, erased, and interlined without the slighest thought either of the printer or his correspondent. Sydney Smith was always quizzing Jeffrey upon his scrawl. "How happy I should be," he says, in one of his notes, "if you would but dictate your letters, and not write them yourself. I can scarcely ever read them!" He gives a description in another of the sort of perplexities he got into in trying to puzzle out Jeffrey's manuscript. "I have tried to read it from left to right, and Mrs. Sydney from right to left, and we neither of us can decipher a single word of it." Constable's printers followed Jeffrey's copy as Scotch terriers follow their quarry, by scent, for it was impossible for any of them to put two sentence

together by sight. "A more illegible hand," says Lord Cockburn, "has rarely tormented friends. The plague of small and misshapen letters is aggravated by a love of contractions, and an aversion to the relief of new paragraphs. There are whole volumes, and even an entire play, with the full complement of acts and scenes, without a new line." The explanation is, of course, the usual one with men of Jeffrey's temperament and genius. He had a horror and hatred of the work of the desk. "I would willingly forfeit any of my attainments," he says, "to acquire a good form of writing. But the truth is, I detest the employment. Such mechanical drudgery! and without any certainty of the attainment of my end."

His favourite hours of reading were in the morning and in bed, unless he had to deal with a subject of peculiar difficulty, and in that case he read it up, as he read up most of his briefs, at night; for he had a notion that hints and suggestions, facts and thoughts, illustrations and authorities, picked up promiscuously over-night, assorted themselves in sleep round their proper centres, and thus reappeared in the morning in logical order, under the influence of some law of crystallization in the intellect or the imagination. He had a "canine appetite for books," and spent most of the mornings of his vacations in what he calls quiet bed readings, in careless talk with friends and visitors, or, when alone, in lounging about in

the woods, reading idle snatches from Shakspeare and Fletcher, and Keats and Shelley, or in "watching seals, and porpoises, and yachts, and steam vessels, and clouds playing with the peaks of Arran," in toying with "the shells and pebbles that engaged the leisure of Scipio and Lælius, in a world in which nothing was like our world but the said shells and pebbles, and the minds of virtuous men resting from their labours," and in quiet contemplative trots before dinner along the sands, with "the waves plashing round his feet, and the wild thyme, and the bees, and the white houses gleaming round the shores of the mountains, bays, and promontories before him." This sort of life was his delight; and in his early days, before he began to dream of the horsehair and ermine of the Lords of Session, he is everlastingly harping upon the pleasures of life in a cottage with 300*l.* a year, a wife and children, friends and books, free from all the vexations of law and politics; for he thought public life, after all, a sort of harlequinade, and never entered into its contests with the zest and ambition of a man who cared two straws about its honours and rewards. Even when at the head of his profession, with a seat in the House of Commons, and in a position where a man of his powers might have won the highest prizes of Parliamentary eloquence, we find him panting for a couple of days with the poets at Craigcrook. "If it were not for my love of

beautiful Nature and poetry," he says, "my heart would have died within me long ago. I never felt before what immeasurable benefactors these same poets are to their kind, and how large a measure, both of actual happiness and prevention of misery, they have imparted to the race. I would willingly give up half my fortune, and some little of the fragments of health and bodily enjoyment that remain to me, rather than that Shakspeare should not have lived before me." This was the man. And this was the kind of life he was always sighing after. "He ever clung to hearts. As soon as any excitement that kept him up was over, his spirit, though strong, and his disposition, though sprightly, depended on the presence of old familiar friends. He scarcely ever took even a professional journey of a day or two alone without helplessness and discomfort;" and in Westminster Hall, on the Treasury Benches of the House of Commons, on the Atlantic, or in America, he is always sighing after the "sweet leisure" of his life at Hatton, his flowers, his books, and his friends, "Tuckey's cherub voice and glittering eyes," his airy tea-drinkings with the open windows and the swallows skimming past them, his long twilight social walks and his long mornings in bed, with the soft moon shining in upon his slumbers through the open windows. And it was here, too, that he was seen at his best. Here, and here almost alone, he was free and genial, thoughtful and witty. At the bar he

made very little play. In the House of Commons he was a failure. He never caught the tone of Holland House; and the conversational style of the Oyster Cellars of Edinburgh, the style, partly of a Scotch professor's class-room, and partly of the literary *salons* of Paris under the *régime* of the Academy, was a little too *bizarre* and dialectic to make much of a sensation in the most polished and brilliant drawing-room of St. James's. But at home with his books, and his flowers, and a few friends, strolling in the woods, or over a glass of wine after dinner, everybody concurs in speaking of him as one of the pleasantest and most suggestive of talkers.

> "Witty as Horatius Flaccus,
> As great a Jacobin as Gracchus:
> Short, though not as fat, as Bacchus,"

is Sydney Smith's description of him in his well-known epigram on Jeffrey,

> "Riding on a little jackass;"

and Sir James Mackintosh speaks of him as "more lively, fertile, and brilliant, than any Scotch man of letters, with more imagery and illustration added to the knowledge and argumentative powers of his country, and more sure than any native of this island whom I have seen, to have had splendid success in the literary societies of Paris." Yet it speaks well for Jeffrey's heart that with all this freshness, vivacity, and wit, he used to thank God

that he had never lost his relish for bad company; and Horner seems to have condensed all his principal foibles and faults as a barrister and a politician into a single sentence, when he said that all he wanted to be as irresistible at the bar and in the House of Commons as he was at his own dinner-table, was to speak slow, to add a cubit to his stature, and to be a little dull.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

SIR WALTER SCOTT has been in his grave for forty years. Even in Edinburgh there can hardly be more than a dozen persons who can recall the vision of his tall, athletic figure, with a pile of forehead and a pair of beetle brows, in green velvet shooting-coat and tartan plaid, limping through the hall of the Court of Session with a stick, to take his stand upon the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and tell old border legends of Scott of Harden. Yet Scott still lives to-day as freshly in the recollection of most of us as if it were but yesterday that he was laid in his grave under the yew tree of Dryburgh churchyard. We know him almost as well as we know all the people of his imagination. He is not, like most of our companions of the book shelves, the shadow of a mighty name and nothing more, but an old friend still grasping us by the hand, still telling us his quaint old Border legends, still playing with his dogs, still fresh in immortal youth. All his thoughts, all the habits of his life, all his little tricks of manner and of voice, are as well known to us, through his son-in-law's sketch of his life, as those of Dr. Johnson are known to us through *Boswell;* and this life is in itself, perhaps, one of the noblest

and most inspiriting epics in our language. I know no man of Scott's genius whose life will bear the fierce light that is thrown upon it in the picturesque pages of Lockhart; and yet in the case of Scott the stronger the light that is thrown upon the workings of his mind, and upon all the habits of his life, the more distinctly does it bring out the lineaments which mark the frankest and manliest type of character. No man, it is said, is a hero to his *valet de chambre*, and with very rare exceptions no man of genius is a hero to his amanuenis. But Sir Walter Scott is a standing protest against the epigram. He was a gentleman even to his dogs; and, although one of the highest Tories to be found in the native region of the highest of Tory politics, every visitor left Abbotsford under a hazy sort of impression that all Scott's foresters, and shepherds, and stable-boys were his blood relations.

This was Scott of Abbotsford as distinguished from Scott the poet and Scott the novelist. Yet what the Author of Waverley was out with his horses and his hounds for a sharp gallop among the braes of the Yarrow with a troup of guests, he was at his desk as an artist, and in all his dealings with his printers and publishers. There was no affectation, no vice, about the man. He was the soul of candour, of honesty, the model of an English gentleman and of an English author. His books are as pure as his life; and his thoughts were as pure as his books.

How few men, after writing a tithe of what Sir Walter Scott wrote, could lay down their pen at the end of their career, and thank God that they had not written a line which upon their death-bed they could wish to blot, that they had written nothing to corrupt any man's principle, or to undermine any man's religion! Yet this Scott could do with all simplicity of heart, although, perhaps, no man ever thought less of the drift and purpose of his fictions when he sat in his snug little Gothic study throwing off a Waverley at the rate of 40 or 50 pages a day; for he was the most unconscious of artists, thinking of nothing but the dramatic development of his story, and caring nothing beyond the circle of characters who were playing their parts in the eye of his own imagination. "He makes no attempt," his critics tell us, "to solve the mystery of existence. "He passes by all the puzzles and perplexities of life." This, of course, is true. But what had Scott to do with the puzzles and perplexities of life in a Waverley Novel? He was not a metaphysician. He was not a political economist. He lived in what Lord Derby called the pre-scientific era; and we feel rather inclined to congratulate ourselves upon the fact than otherwise: for had Scott fallen into the hands of the critics who wished to interweave his genius with a thread or two of the metaphysician, perhaps we should not be able to cherish his memory to-day as that of the Prince of Storytellers. In his

own walk in literature Scott is superb, and he has made every path in the field of fiction his own. He has had many disciples, many imitators, and some of these, too, men of distinguished powers. But he stands alone to-day, towering as proudly pre-eminent over every contemporary and rival as he did when George the Fourth marked the national appreciation of his genius by the stroke of his sword which made the Author of Waverley Sir Walter Scott of Abbotsford. He has but one rival in English literature, the rival of Homer, the dramatist and poet whose hand swept each note of the lyre and was master of all. Our Caledonian cousins are fond of calling the sheriff of the cairn and scaur the Scottish Shakspeare; but except in the wealth and prodigality of his powers the hardy Borderer had less in common with the Bard of the Avon than he had with Goëthe. Perhaps the Homer of the North would be a more fitting title for the poet who sang of Border chivalry with all the dash and picturesque power of the proudest minstrel of the Ionian Princes. This was Scott's *forte;* and to him more, perhaps, than to anyone else, we owe that renaissance age of chivalry which is perhaps the best representation we can hope to have—or shall we say wish to have?—of the proud and generous spirit which distinguished the knights and squires of the Crusades. Sir William Stirling Maxwell pictures Sir Walter Scott as one of the old Homeric heroes, of

superhuman powers, in the wig and gown of a Scottish advocate; and this forms an apt and picturesque image of the man who half filled our bookshelves fifty years ago with Waverley novels and Border ballads, to raise money, first of all, to buy a few hundred acres of moor along the Tweed, and then, when this vision almost disappeared from the dream of his life, to preserve the chastity of his honour by clearing off a mountain of debt which a band of unprincipled men had piled up under the shadow of his credit. Constable once proposed, in the extremity of his difficulties, to raise £100,000 rom the Bank of England, upon the security of the unwritten novels still in the brain of Sir Walter Scott; and the idea, except in its daring originality, was not at all as preposterous as most men of business would probably have thought it. Had Scott lived out the full measure of his days, he could have redeemed even a bond of this amount; for coiled up in his capacious brain lay romance and poetry enough to people the Desert of Zahara. Even when the pen dropped from his paralysed hand, his imagination was as active, as fresh, and as prolific as it was when he fished out the manuscript of the first volume of "Waverley" from the drawer of an old cabinet, and threw off its two companion volumes in three weeks. His hand had lost its freeness. But that was all. The intellectual principle was still strong within him; and to the last his intellect triumphed over the para-

lytic hand which had accomplished so many brilliant feats of genius, and, in accomplishing these, thrown more poetry and romance into the life of most of us than all the rest of his contemporaries and rivals have done in the most active and prolific century of English literature.

Yet, gigantic as Sir Walter Scott's powers were, they were of slower growth than the powers of any man of genius whose name can be spoken in the same breath with that of the Ariosto of the North. He did not write his "Lay" till he was thirty-four, and he was forty-three when "Waverley" was published. These facts stand almost alone in the chronology of genius, for with very rare exceptions, poets and novelists have written their best works in the first flush of youth, and written very little at the age when Sir Walter Scott was throwing off his best novels, that is, from forty-five to sixty. Pope wrote his "Essay on Criticism" in his teens, and that Essay, as Dr. Johnson said, at once placed its author in the first rank of critics and of poets. Shelley wrote "Queen Mab" at eighteen, and "The Cenci" at twenty-six. All Coleridge's masterpieces were written before he was five-and-twenty. Byron was only twenty-four when he published the first canto of Childe Harold; and he wrote "Don Juan" at thirty Burns threw off the "Cottar's Saturday Night," at twenty-six, and "Tam O'Shanter" at thirty-two. "Pickwick" was the work of a youth still serving his apprenticeship to literature. "The

School for Scandal" was the work of a man of five-and-twenty, and the first volume of Ruskin's "Modern Painters" was written at twenty-four. "Vivian Grey" was the work of a boy, and Sir Bulwer Lytton had published most of his novels long before the age at which the author of "Waverley" discovered that fiction, after all, was his forte.

Sir Walter Scott made his first appearance in the field where he was destined to win so many triumphs with a thin quarto volume of translations from the ballads of Bürger in his hand. It was not a brilliant *début;* and I do not believe that a single copy of the work is now to be found. It fell dead from the press; and most of the edition was condemned to the service of the trunkmaker, with the mass of the rival translations of German ballads which were then issuing from half the presses of London and Edinburgh. The author's own friends, of course, were in high glee about it, and perhaps not without reason, for the work, trifling as it is, was distinguished from most of its rivals by many terse and vigorous lines, by many striking metaphors, by many bold and picturesque expressions; but out of his own quiet and narrow circle the volume was hardly seen, and no critic of the day discovered beneath this blank shield the slightest trace of the most brilliant and dashing poet of a generation distinguished by the publication of poems like "Childe Harold," the "Revolt of Islam," the "Excursion," the "Ancient

Mariner," the "Curse of Kehama," and the romance of "Lalla Rookh." Scott's failure was complete and palpable; and it stands out in marked contrast with the triumph which a sparkling, bright-eyed Irish youth, poring over the dusty tomes in the old library of Archbishop Marsh, under the tower of St. Patrick's Cathedral, was then preparing himself with the "Odes of Anacreon." But palpable as it was, the failure hardly touched the spirits of the hardy Borderer. He returned to his desk in his father's office, to copy writs, with as free a heart as if he had won a victory as brilliant and decisive as Tom Moore's. "I was coolly received by strangers," he said, recalling the incident many years afterwards, when he stood at the head of English literature, "but my reputation began rather to increase among my own friends, and on the whole I was more bent to show the world that it had neglected something worth notice, than to be affronted by its indifference."

The history of the translation itself is not without its interest, giving us, as it does, our first glimpse of Walter Scott at work. Till Scott took up these German ballads, he had been known, I need hardly say, principally as a harum-scarum sort of youth, of awkward and bashful manners, possessing a fund of queer stories and old Border ballads, little scholarship, and less law, but with a turn for versification and story-telling; and one evening, when the conversation at his father's table happened to turn upon

the ballads of Bürger, Scott promised one of the guests, Miss Cranstoun, a rhymed version of the most popular of them, "Lenore," from his own pen. He began his task after supper, and sat up till he had finished it, working himself up to such a state of excitement in reproducing the vivid imagery of the original as to set sleep at defiance. He presented his translation to Miss Cranstoun at breakfast the next morning, and she seems to have been particularly struck by its point and finish. "Upon my word," she said, writing to a friend, "Walter Scott is going to turn out a poet—something of a cross, I think, between Burns and Gray."

This is the first glimpse that any one seems to have had of that turn for poetry and romance which within ten years was to raise the loutish son of an Edinburgh attorney into the position of the Ariosto of the North; and the discovery took every one by surprise. Scott's father had frequently been perplexed by finding the wild moss-trooping blood of Harden asserting itself in his son, and asserting itself often in a way that promised anything but success in a profession like the law. But the old gentleman would probably have been less surprised to hear that his son had turned foot-pad and taken to the road, after the fashion of his Border ancestors, than he must have been to hear that the lad had turned poet. Yet, when the discovery had once been made, all Scott's friends must have confessed to

themselves that this had been his bent from his cradle, and that the instincts of the boy had been rooted and strengthened in him by the whole course of his reading, as well as by all the associations of his life, till he was set on a stool in his father's office to engross deeds and to puzzle out the mysteries of the law of Scottish entail. Homer, Spenser, Milton, Ossian, Tasso, the novels of Richardson, Fielding, and of Smollett, all the literature of romance and imagination that a boy with a ravenous appetite for books could lay his hands upon in the library of a Scottish laird,—these had been the companions of almost every moment that Scott could call his own, from the day that he could put two sentences together in type; and, above all, Bishop Percy's "Reliques of Ancient Poetry." This book fired his imagination more than anything else that he ever read, and it was in poring over this volume that Sir Walter Scott formed and nurtured the genius which made him, at forty, as Wordsworth said, "the whole world's darling."

It was under a large platanus tree in his aunt's garden, at Kelso, that he first read these ballads, forgetting even the dinner-hour in his enjoyment of his new treasure. "To read and to remember was, in this instance," he says, "the same thing, and henceforth I overwhelmed my schoolfellows, and all who would hearken to me, with tragical recitations from the ballads of Bishop Percy. The first time, too, I could scrape a few shillings together, which

were not common occurrences with me, I bought unto myself a copy of these beloved volumes; nor do I believe I ever read a book half so frequently, or with half the enthusiasm." Browsing all day in his hours of thought upon works of this stimulating nature, and browsing upon them year after year during all the period when the heart is freshest and the imagination most active, Scott spent most of his evenings at his grandfather's fireside, listening with rapt attention to tales of the Jacobite risings from the lips of men who had been outlawed almost as often as William of Deloraine, to anecdotes of Border life and its heroes, to Scottish songs, and to legends of "auld Wat Harden" and the rest of his kinsmen in the old days of Border chivalry; and in a few years we find him, almost as a matter of course, giving reign to his faculties and manufacturing legends on his own account, for the mere pleasure of brooding over them, with a rod and line in his hand, on the banks of the Tweed, or of relating them in the playground or over the yule log to his schoolfellows.

He tells us, in his notes upon his life, "that whole holidays were spent in this pastime, which continued for two or three years, and had, I believe, no small effect in directing the turn of my imagination to the chivalrous and romantic in poetry and prose." "He used to interest us," writes a lady who was then his playmate, "by telling us the *visions*, as he called them, which he had lying alone.

. . . . Child as I was I could not help being delighted with his description of the glories he had seen. Recollecting these descriptions, radiant as they were, I have often thought since that there must have been a bias in his mind to superstition: The marvellous seemed to have such power over him, though the mere offsprings of his own imagination, that the expression of his face, habitually that of genuine benevolence, mingled with a shrewd innocent humour, changed greatly while he was speaking of these things, and showed a deep intenseness of feeling, as if he were awed even by his own recital."

Perhaps a few years of hard drill in an attorney's office might have extinguished this boyish passion of Scott's. This was the hope of his father, and it was a hope which was apparently in a very fair way of realising itself when the "Wild Huntsman" and "Lenore" fell fresh into his hands. These ballads stirred his imagination to its depths afresh—stirred it more, perhaps, than anything he had read since he cut the leaves of his first copy of Percy's "Reliques" in the garden at Kelso. Miss Cranstoun's flatteries told upon him like a spur. Making up his mind to realise her conception of the powers of his genius, Scott at once set vigorously to work—with the assistance of an old German dictionary, which he borrowed from the original of Jonathan Oldbuck, and with that of his clever and accomplished cousin of Harden—to translate everything that struck him in

his reading of the literature of Germany—lyrics from his old master, Goethe, ballads from Bürger, and dramas wherever he found them; and in 1799 a selection of these translations was, through the assistance of Monk Lewis, "a martinet in rhyme and numbers," published under Scott's own name by Mr. Bell. This was the first of Sir Walter Scott's acknowledged publications, and it was the first, too, that brought him a penny in the form of what he calls "copy-money." Its price was £25.

Concurrently with the translation of these scraps of German poetry, Scott had been spending most of the leisure of his vacations in hunting up the traditions of Liddesdale, in collecting the ballads of the Scottish marches, and making his "first serious attempts in verse," by writing, in imitation of these ballads, the trifles by which he won his spurs as an original writer—"The Fire King," "The Grey Brothers," "Glenfinlas," and "The Eve of St. John." It was not, however, till he was preparing the third volume of the "Minstrelsy" for the press that the idea of trying his 'prentice hand at anything more ambitious struck him; and in its original form even the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" was, to use his own words, nothing more than "a romance of Border chivalry in a light-horseman sort of stanza." Like his translation of "Lenore," too, this "Lay" owed its origin to the suggestion of a lady, the Countess of Dalkeith. Scott was in the habit, when living at

Ashestiel, of riding out with his lovely chieftainess and her husband—

> When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill;

and in the course of one of these pleasant rides, Lady Dalkeith happened to repeat the grotesque story of "Gilpin Horner," which she had recently heard from an old gentleman on a visit at the castle, as "an o'er true tale." She insisted that Scott should turn it into a Border ballad." "Had she asked me to write a ballad on a broomstick," said Scott, "I must have attempted it." He therefore took up his pen and sketched out a few verses to be called the "Goblin Page," in imitation of the style of "Lady Christabel," which he had recently heard read, in part at least, from Coleridge's MS. at a supper by Sir John Stoddart. These preliminary verses Scott read over one evening after dinner to a couple of his friends, Erskine and Cranstoun. They listened, as men generally listen to MS. with their dinner still in their throats, with perplexing politeness, and nothing more. They smoked their cigars, passed on the claret, h'm'd, drew a sigh of relief at the end of the first canto, kept their criticism to themselves, and went back to the thread of conversation which Scott had broken with his cold dash of poetry. This to a man of Scott's temperament was like a wet blanket. He interpreted their silence as meaning that they did not think much of what

they had heard; and taking his cue from their inarticulate criticism, he threw his stanzas aside in a fit of disgust. "They lay long by me," he says, in a letter to Miss Seward, "till the applause of some friends whose judgment I valued, induced me to resume the poem. So, on I wrote, knowing no more than the man in the moon how I was to end. At length the story appeared so uncouth that I was fain to put it into the mouth of my old 'Minstrel' lest the nature of it should be misunderstood, and I should be suspected of setting up a new school of poetry, instead of a feeble attempt to imitate the old. In the process of the romance, the page, intended to be a principal person in the work, contrived (from the baseness of his natural propensities, I suppose) to slink downstairs into the kitchen; and now he must e'en abide there."

The scene and date of this resumption Lockhart traced years after in the recollection of a cornet in the Edinburgh Light Horse. While the troop were on permanent duty at Musselburgh, in the autumnal recess of 1802, Scott, the Quarter-Master, during a charge on Portobello Sands, received a kick from a horse, which confined him for three days to his lodgings. Mr. Skene found him busy with his pen; and he produced before these three days expired the first canto of the "Lay"—very nearly, if his friend's memory may be trusted, in the state in which it was ultimately published. That the whole poem was

sketched and filled in with extraordinary rapidity there can be no difficulty in believing. He himself says (in the introduction of 1830), "that after he had once got fairly into the vein, it proceeded at the rate of about a canto a week." Visiting London shortly afterwards, Scott read the manuscript to his friend Mr. Ellis, under a tree in Windsor Forest; and afterwards "partly read and partly recited, sometimes in an enthusiastic style of chant," the first three or four cantos to Wordsworth, when on a visit to Ashestiel. Of its success when published I need say nothing; it was prodigious; and, under cover of this success, Scott at once made up his mind to make literature the profession of his life.

This point once settled, and the law abandoned—except as a crutch—Scott set to work with characteristic energy, entered into partnership with the Ballantynes, stocked a printing-office in the Canongate with types and presses, and drew up a plan of work sufficient to keep them and himself well employed for three or four years, by the republication of a costly series of English classics. To be the editor of Dryden and Swift, and the annotator of old ballads, was at this time the highest ambition of the most brilliant and fertile author of one of the most brilliant and fertile ages of English literature. Poetry was the last thing in his thoughts. "As for riding on Pegasus," he said, in a note to Mr. Ellis, when at work on the proofs of Dryden, "depend upon

it, I will never again cross him in a serious way, unless I should, by some strange accident, reside so long in the Highlands, and make myself master of their ancient manners, so as to paint them with some degree of accuracy, in a kind of companion to the 'Minstrel Lay.'" To vary the monotony of hunting up original readings and scribbling foot-notes, Scott threw off an article now and then for Jeffrey's *Review*; and in the summer vacation of 1805 we find him trying his hand at "a companion to the Lay," by throwing together, in the form of an historical novel, some of his recollections of Highland scenery and customs. This was the origin of "Waverley." Like the "Lay," however, it was no sooner taken up than it was thrown aside. "When I had proceeded as far, I think, as the seventh chapter, I showed my work to a critical friend, whose opinion was unfavourable; and having then some poetical reputation, I was unwilling to risk the loss of it by attempting a new style of composition. I therefore then threw aside the work I had commenced, without either reluctance or remonstrance." It was not till some months after this that the idea of writing "Marmion" seems to have suggested itself, and the necessity of raising £1,000, to pay off some debts of his brother Thomas, was the motive of this magnificent poem. Constable offered his sum at once for the copyright, without asking to see a line of the MS., and, indeed, even before a line of it had

been written; and it was under the spur of making the poem all that Scott thought it ought to be for this handsome sum—as £1,000 was then thought to be for a poem—that he put his whole soul into his task, and gave up to its composition all the time that he could spare from the proof-sheets of Dryden.

Most of the poem seems to have been composed on horseback, either on the banks of the Yarrow or on the sands of Portobello. Mr. Skene, his mess-companion, tells us "that in the intervals of drilling, when out with the Edinburgh Light Horse, Scott use to delight in walking his powerful black steed up and down by himself upon the Portobello Sands, within the beating of the surge; and now and then you would see him plunge in his spurs and go off as if at the charge, with the spray dashing about him. As we rode back to Musselburgh, he often came and placed himself beside me, to repeat the verses he had been composing during these pauses of our exercise." The description of Flodden Field was struck out in this way; and we know from Scott's conversations with Lockhart, years after, that most of the rest of his descriptive pieces were put together in the saddle when out for "a grand gallop among the braes of the Yarrow." The letters at the head of the cantos were an afterthought, or at least the idea of weaving these letters into the web and woof of the poem. Originally they were intended to be published in the form of "Six Epistles from Ettrick Forest;" and

Scott afterwards aknowledged, with Southey, that if they were to be bound up at all with "Marmion" they ought to have been bound up at the end of the volume, or at the beginning, or anywhere except where they are. But Scott, who even when writing poetry always kept his eye upon the market, thought "Marmion" by itself too thin a volume for a guinea and a half, and partly as an act of generosity to the publisher, and partly as an act of generosity to the public, threw in these half-dozen epistles as a sort of make-weight.

"Marmion," as a commercial success, put even the "Lay" into the shade. It was the work of less than a couple of years, or perhaps I ought to say of the vacations of a couple of years, and of the hours that Scott could steal from his task-work. But even the sale of ten thousand copies of his poem at a guinea and a half a volume within a year was not enough to induce Scott to throw up his editions of Dryden and Swift, and devote himself to poetry as the main business of his life. "I have done with poetry for some time," he told Ellis, in answer to an appeal to throw his proof-sheets aside as drudgery beneath the dignity of the author of "Marmion." "It is a scourging crop, and editing is a green crop." The green crop, however, was but a short one. In less than a year Scott was wooing the Muse again under the inspiration of the pathetic tradition of Ellen and the Knight of Snowdon.

Of the conception of the "Lady of the Lake," I can find no account beyond this, that Scott, in the summer of 1809, undertook to have a third poem ready to keep Ballantyne's press in action at the end of the year. What this poem was to be Scott, probably, knew no more than Ballantyne, for about this time he began what I may perhaps call the system of drawing bills at three, six, and nine months upon his genius, to raise cash to pay for his purchases at Abbotsford, or to guard against the presses and types in the Canongate lying idle for a day; but in reading or conversation, his imagination had been set on fire by the story of the Lady of the Lake; and upon the rising of the Court of Session in July, we find him starting off with Mrs. Scott and his eldest daughter to revisit the scenes which he had chosen for the framework of his fable. Not a little of this poem was, I believe, written in the course of the trip. The description of the stag chase certainly was; and I do not think one needs the gift of second sight, knowing what we do of Scott's habits, to pick out at least one passage which was worked out in the course of the gallop from the shore of Loch Vennachar to the Rock of Stirling, which Scott undertook to anticipate his critics by testing the practicability of a good horseman, well mounted, riding within the space allowed to Fitzjames after his duel with Roderick Dhu. Exceptbits of description, however, here and there, the greater part of the "Lady of the Lake"

was confessedly written at Ashestiel during the winter of 1809; and we have from his own pen a characteristic conversation which took place with his cousin, Miss Christian Rutherford, upon the poem and its composition.

A lady to whom I was nearly related, and with whom I lived during her whole life on the most brotherly terms of affection, was residing with me when the work was in progress, and used to ask me what I could possibly do to rise so early in the morning. At last I told her the subject of my meditations, and I can never forget the anxiety and affection expressed in her reply. "Do not be so rash," she said, "my dearest cousin. You are already popular—more so, perhaps, than you yourself will believe, or than even I or other partial friends can fairly allow to your merit. You stand high, do not rashly attempt to climb higher, and incur the risk of a fall; for, depend upon it, a favourite will not be permitted even to stumble with impunity." I replied to this affectionate expostulation in the words of Montrose:—

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all.

"If I fail," I said, for the dialogue is strong in my recollection, "it is a sign that I ought never to have succeeded, and I will write prose for life. You shall see no change in my temper, nor will I eat a single meal the worse. But if I succeed—

"Up wi' the bonnie blue bonnet,
The dirk and the feather an' a'!"

How he did succeed I need not say, for the success of the "Lady of the Lake" is one of the brightest traditions of Paternoster Row. Till the

"Lady of the Lake" appeared, the Highlands were as little known to the mass of Englishmen as Iceland. But within a couple of months of its publication the Trossachs were swarming with an army of visitors from every part of the island; and it is a statistical fact, that from the year the "Lady of the Lake" appeared the post-horse duty rose at a jump, and continued to rise regularly year by year as editions of the poem multiplied and the circle of its readers grew wider.

Till Scott published the "Lay," his highest ambition would have been realised by the possession of a cottage at the foot of Minchmoor, with perhaps a hundred acres of heath along the banks of the Tweed, and a couple of spare bedrooms, with dressing-rooms, in which, on a pinch, a couch-bed might be let down for an extra visitor or two. But the success of the "Lay," and still more the success of "Marmion," changed the spirit of his dream. The cottage grew into a castle; the hundred acres at once rose up in his imagination in the form of a gentleman's seat, studded with woods and plantations. He saw himself a few years hence playing the part of a Border chief, of a Scottish laird of the old type, with a host of dependants around him, horses, dogs, huntsmen, foresters, and household servants—the territorial and social equal of his kinsman, Scott of Harden. He saw that he could coin money by his brain, that in working his vein for criticism and poetry he was

working a vein of virgin gold; and as he turned out volume after volume of Swift and Dryden, with a fee of £40 a volume, fifty-guinea articles for the *Edinburgh Review*, and poems which added £1,000 to his banker's balance at a stroke, this dream grew and strengthened till it became ingrained in all his thoughts, one of the passions of his life. When, therefore, Clarty Hole fell into the market, Scott rose to the bait, like a bull-trout at a painted fly. It was exactly the spot to take his fancy, for he valued scenery all his life, not as an artist values it, in itself and for itself, but as an antiquarian values it, for its associations; and Clarty Hole, with all its barrenness, was rich in the sort of associations that took Scott's fancy. We can see at a glance how his imagination pictured Abbotsford, with its gables and its towers, with its stables and gardens, and its fair domain, rising, like the phantom of one of his own dreams, out of the naked moor, a few turnip fields, a Scotch cottage and farmyard, and a few straggling Scotch firs, which was all that Clarty Hole was when the sheriff of the cairn and scaur crossed the Tweed to take possession of what he intended to make the hereditary home of "the Scotts of Abbotsford." He was in raptures with this bleak bit of black moor, with its background of bare hills. To his eye these grey hills and all this wild Border country had beauties peculiar to themselves. "I like the very nakedness of the land," he said to Washington Irving,

striking his stick upon the heath. "It has something bold, stern, and solitary about it. When I have been for some time in the rich scenery about Edinburgh, which is like ornamented garden land, I begin to wish myself back again among my own honest grey hills; and if I did not see the heather at least once a year, I think I should die." To him this bare and cheerless scene, where, as he once confessed, you might, without much of an effort, realise to yourself the superstition of the chase in the air, hear the baying of the hounds, the throttling sobs of the deer, the wild hallos of the huntsmen, and the

> Hoof thick beating on the hollow hill,

was in his eyes as exquisite in its beauty as the dell of Egira in the eyes of Byron, as rich in romance as Monte Rosa. He admits now and then, when pressed by visitors like Moore and Washington Irving, that the scenery is not quite equal in picturesque beauty to the lakes of Killarney, or to the banks of the Clyde. But he always takes care to balance every admission of this sort with a dozen "buts;" and to him it was quite enough that the scene with all its faults was, as he was always telling his visitors and his correspondents, "in the very centre of the ancient Reged." He walked Washington Irving off his legs with Tom Purdie and his hounds, in the thick of a Scotch mist, to point out to him the Catrail, which had bounded

Reged wide
And fair Strath-Clyde

when the Roman eagles were flying on the haugh of Callander, the glen of Thomas the Rhymer, the haunted ruins of Boldside, the field of the battle of Melrose, the last great clan fight of the Borders, and the Eildon Hills, cleft into their picturesque serration by the magic art of one of his own ancestors, Michael Scott, and to trace the course of the

Yarrow through the woods
And down the meadow ranging.

To plant and adorn this wilderness, and to raise the towers of Abbotsford in rivalry with those of Harden and Bowhill, was, as Scott frankly avowed, the only object that he had at heart in taking up his pen to write "Rokeby." "I want to build my cottage a little better than my limited finances will permit out of my ordinary income (he says, writing to his friend Mr. Morritt at Rokeby, proposing to run over and see him, to pick up a few hints for the scenery of his poem upon the spot); and although it is very true that an author should not hazard his reputation, yet, as Bob Acres says, I really think reputation should take some care of the gentleman in return." "As I am turned improver upon the earth of this every-day world, it was under condition that the small tenement of Parnassus, which might be accessible to my labours, should not remain uncultivated."

This was the origin and the mainspring of "Rokeby." The price of the poem was fixed beforehand at £3,000, and to earn this £3,000 as quickly as it could be earned by the pen of a poet, was the thought uppermost in the mind of Scott when he put aside his "Life of Swift" for a few weeks to throw off an English companion to his "Lady of the Lake," and "Marmion." In the "Lay" Scott threw the force upon *style;* in "Marmion" it is thrown upon *description;* in the "Lady of the Lake" upon *incident;* in "Rokeby" he determined to try his hand upon the portraiture of *character;* and in the rough draft which he drew up of the poem, he selected Bruce for his hero, intending to sketch the most heroic of his achievements in the poem. Burns had hit upon the same idea; and it was probably this idea that Scott had in his head when he sketched out the plan of the "Lord of the Isles." But Scott had hardly written a dozen lines of his poem, when he saw that it was impossible to make it what it ought to be without a visit to the Hebrides and the Orkneys, and he threw it aside in favour of a subject likelier to suit the taste of his readers south of the Tweed. He had often promised his friend Mr. Morritt to make his park and castle the scene of one of his romances, and he now made up his mind to make it the scene of a sketch of the Parliamentary Civil War. Mr. Morritt tried to induce him to throw back the date of his story to the Wars of the

Roses, in order to keep himself free to make use of the ghost stories and all the rest of the superstitious traditions which still lingered in the echoes of the ruined castles upon his estate, in every glen and in every wood. But it was to no purpose. Scott had fixed his mind upon the Parliamentary War, and he was not to be turned. He revisited Rokeby to refresh his recollection of its scenery, and to catch the inspiration of the *genius loci*, and returned to his cottage at Abbotsford to write his poem. It was written in the midst of a scene which would have driven most poets out of their wits. The clank of the stonecutter's hammer, the clink of the trowel, and the whizz of the carpenter's plane were ringing in his ears all day; and in a note to one of his friends upon the progress of the house and the poem, he gives an amusing account of "twelve masons hammering at the one, and one poor noddle at the other." He had no room of his own. What he did he had to do in the midst of workmen, of servants, of wife and children, and now and then of visitors. But when he wished to be particularly quiet, he tells us that he used to improvise a study by placing his desk in the recess of a window overlooking the Tweed, and hanging up an old bed-curtain across the room. This was his original study at Abbotsford, and it was here that "Rokeby" was written concurrently with the "Lord of the Isles" and "Trierman," in the summer of 1809.

These were not the happiest efforts of his genius. They sold, as everything from Scott's pen did sell; and thus enabled him "to retreat from the field with the honours of war." But, as a poet, Scott no longer stood alone. He had to contend against powerful rivals in the South, especially against the authors of the "Corsair" and "Lalla Rookh;" and although he might probably have vanquished both had he put his heart into his work afresh, he allowed Ballantyne to extinguish the poet in him by a single hint that the star of Byron had eclipsed the star of Scott. He took it into his head that he was too old and stupid for poetry, abandoned the field to Byron and Moore, and turned to fiction to gather fresh laurels. "Well, James, we can't afford to give over." This was his answer to Ballantyne, as he sat at his desk trimming his pen afresh for "Waverley." "Since one line has failed, we must try another."

It was under these circumstances that he turned his thoughts to fiction. He had frequently within the last year or two spoken to Ballantyne and Constable of trying his hand at a novel; but with "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake" in the first flush of their popularity, the printer and publisher were too busy to think of anything but poetry, or, at least, of poetry with an afterthought to Swift, whose works Scott was annotating, in the few hours that he could steal from the Court of Session, under an editorial fee of £1,500. Hunting, however, one

day in an old cabinet for fishing tackle, Scott turned up the MS. of "Waverley." He ran his eye through it, thought it had been undervalued, and determined to finish it. He looked through his notes, brushed up his recollections of the Highlands, and threw off the companion volumes in three weeks. The MS. was copied out by Ballantyne and submitted to Constable, without any hint as to the author. He offered £700 for it off-hand. But Scott had set his mind upon £1,000. The point was compromised, and the book published upon the plan of half-profits. In three months Constable was biting his fingers with vexation that he had not taken "Waverley" upon the author's own terms. The work was in its fifth edition by the end of the year, and Scott and Constable were pocketing £1,000 apiece out of its profits. This was one of the busiest and most prolific periods of Scott's life. He was at work morning, noon and night, either at his proofs of Swift, at the "Lord of the Isles," or at one of his novels. He was up to his chin in engagements arising out of his printing partnership with the Ballantynes, and out of his building and planting projects at Abbotsford; and he worked like a horse to set himself free. He wrote "Guy Mannering" in six weeks, to raise cash to meet a bill; and in the famous vision of Menzies we have a vivid sketch of Scott in his quiet little study in Edinburgh at work upon one of its companion romances. Three or four of Scott's friends

were one evening spending an hour or two together over whisky and cigars in a room overlooking Scott's study. Scott was at his desk, and Menzies, after looking at him for some time, turned pale, laid down his cigar, and put his hands before his eyes. "The sight of that confounded hand," he said, "which has often bothered me before, won't let me fill my glass with a good will. I have been watching it ever since we sat down. It fascinates my eye; it never stops; page after page is finished and thrown on that heap of MS., and still it goes on unwearied; and so it will be till candles are brought in, and God knows how long after that. It is the same every night. I can't stand a sight of it when I am not at my books."

This was Scott at Edinburgh. At Ashestiel and, at first, at Abbotsford, he did most of his work in the midst of his family, like Sydney Smith, with music and conversation and all the rest of the diversions of a group of boys and girls going on around. It was this fact that perplexed all Scott's friends and visitors, and even his own sons and daughters, to explain the rumours which attributed the "Waverley Novels" to the author of the "Lay." "We don't know what to think of these novels," said Scott's eldest daughter to Wilkie, when he was taking her portrait. "We have access to all papa's papers. He has no particular study, writes everything in the midst of us all, and yet we have never seen a single

scrap of the MS. of these novels. But still we have one reason for thinking them his, and only one, and that is, that they are the only works published in Scotland of which copies are not presented to papa."

Till Scott took up his abode at Ashestiel and settled down to his task as a man of letters by profession, he had been in the habit, like Byron and Jeffrey and most men of their class, of lengthening the day by stealing a few hours from the night. But upon a suggestion from his physician that this habit was likely to aggravate his nervous headaches, he at once reversed his plan, and adopted those habits of early rising and of early work which characterised him from this period till the pen dropped from his cramped fingers on the closing pages of "Count Robert of Paris." He was out of bed by five o'clock all the year round, at his desk by six, and by the time that his family and visitors assembled at breakfast between nine and ten, he had "broken the neck of his day's work." These were his hours of inspiration, and generally of his best work. Observing how Scott was harrassed by lion-hunters at Ashestiel, and what a number of hours he spent either in shooting or coursing with his visitors, or in looking after his workpeople, Mr. Cadell, Constable's partner, once expressed his wonder that Scott should ever be able to write books at all in the country. "I know that you contrive to get a few hours in your

own room, and that may do for the mere pen-work, but when is it that you think?" "Oh," said Scott, "I lie *simmering* over things for an hour or so before I get up, and there's the time I am dressing to overhaul my half-sleeping, half-waking *projet de chapitre*, and when I get the paper before me, it is commonly run off pretty easily. Besides, I often take a doze in the plantations, and while Tom works out a dike or a drain as I have directed, one's fancy may be running its ain riggs in some other world." He attests the same facts in his diary eight or ten years afterwards. "The half-hour between waking and rising has all my life proved propitious to any task which was exercising my invention. When I got over any knotty difficulty in a story, or have had in former times to fill up a passage in a poem, it was always when I first opened my eyes that the desired ideas thronged upon me. This is so much the case that I am in the habit of relying upon it, and saying to myself, when I am at a loss, 'Never mind, we shall have it at seven o'clock to-morrow morning.'" Scott, in fact, thought so much of these morning hours, as the hours when his thoughts were fresh, that he generally lingered over his toilet longer than he did over anything else—"shaving and dressing," as his son-in-law tells us, "with great deliberation; for he was a very martinet as to all but the mere coxcombries of the toilet, not abhorring effeminate dandyism itself so cordially as

the slightest approach to the personal slovenliness, or even those 'bedgown and slipper tricks,' as he called them, in which literary men are so apt to indulge." Perhaps no brighter picture is to be found in the history of genius than of this of Sir Walter Scott sitting down to his morning task dressed in the green velvet shooting-jacket of a Scottish laird, with his books and papers around him, on the desk and on the floor, his favourite hound eyeing him from the rug, a couple of spaniels gamboling with his children in the garden, and the songs of the birds pouring in through his half-open window. Scott knew nothing of those feelings of irritation that make composition a torment to so many men! His study was always open to his children no less than to his greyhound. "He never considered their tattle as any disturbance; they went and came as pleased their fancy. He was always ready to answer their questions; and when they, unconscious how he was engaged, entreated him to lay down his pen and tell them a story, he would take them on his knee, repeat a ballad or a legend, kiss them, and set them down again to their marbles or ninepins, and resume his labour as if refreshed by the interruption." Of course, when at Edinburgh, two or three hours after breakfast were spent at the clerk's table in the Court of Session; but when at Ashestiel or Abbotsford, these hours were devoted to the "Lady of the Lake," "Rokeby," or one of his novels. He generally,

however, laid down his pen about one o'clock, and devoted the afternoon to sport or exercise. When he had visitors staying with him, he would even say, "Out, damned spot, and be a gentleman," at ten o'clock; and in fine weather he was so complaisant in this respect that most of his visitors, like Washington Irving and Sir David Wilkie, left him with the impression that, by whatever magic he might contrive to keep Ballantyne's press at work, he was a man of leisure, who had nothing to do but to bask in the sunshine and repeat legends and ballads for the diversion of himself and his friends.

Of course the explanation of this apparent leisure of Scott, in comparison with the vast amount of MS. which he turned out, was to be found partly in the regularity of his habits, the steadiness with which, day after day, week after week, and year after year, he adhered to his plan of setting apart four or five hours of every morning to his task; and partly in the ease and fluency with which he used his pen when he did sit down to his desk. When Scott took up his pen it was not to think, but to write. He never knew what it was to cast about either for a thought or an expression; and he never wasted a second with the file. Possessing a prodigious memory—a memory that lost nothing—a powerful and vivid imagination, a fluent pen, and a spirit that courted difficulties instead of craning at them, Sir Walter Scott never needed anything more than an

incident or a tradition to start with in any of his novels; and when he had once laid down the "keel of a story," it grew under his hands, chapter by chapter, and volume by volume; and a stroll in the woods, or the half hour's quiet between waking and sleeping, or dressing, was enough to supply him with his chapters for the day's work. "I sometimes think," he says, speaking of Harold the Dauntless, "my fingers set up for themselves, independent of my head; for twenty times I have begun a thing on a certain plan, and never in my life adhered to it (in a work of imagination, that is) for half an hour together." "The action of composition," as he goes on to say, after noting down a similar confession in his diary years after, when, writing "Woodstock," he found himself at the end of the second volume without the slightest idea how the story was to be wound up to a catastrophe in the third volume—"the action of composition always extended some passages, and abridged or omitted others; and personages were rendered important or insignificant, not according to their agency in the original conception of the piece, but according to the success or otherwise with which I was able to bring them out. I only tried to make that which I was actually writing diverting and interesting, leaving the rest to fate. I have," he adds, "been often amused with the critics distinguishing some passages as particularly laboured, when the pen passed over the whole as fast as it

could move, and the eye never again saw them, except in proof." These sort of confessions turn up again and again in his diary and his correspondence with Ballantyne and his brothers and sisters of the quill. Referring to the "Maid of Perth," for instance, he makes a note in his diary that he has "sent off ten more pages this morning with a murrain. But how to get my catastrophe packed into the compass allotted for it?

> It sticks like a pistol half out of its holster,
> Or rather, indeed, like an obstinate bolster,
> Which I think I have seen you attempting, my dear,
> In vain to cram into a small pillow-bier.

There is no help for it. I must make a *tour de force*, and annihilate both time and space." Of the "Antiquary," again, he says, in a note to Mr. Morritt:—"I have only a very general sketch at present; but when once I get my pen to the paper, it will walk fast enough. I am sometimes tempted to leave it alone, and try whether it will not write as well without the assistance of my head as with it." The "Lord of the Isles" and "Guy Mannering" grew under his hands in exactly the same manner. Like the "Antiquary," and like all his works, they were written without either plan or premeditation. "The ideas rise as I write;" and the faster he wrote, Ballantyne used to say, the freer the ideas rose, and the better the story developed itself. This was

Scott's opinion also. "I cannot pull well in long traces," he used to say, "when the draught is too far behind me. I love to have the press thumping, clattering, and banging in my rear; it creates the necessity which almost always makes me work best." When he was ahead of the press—when the printer's devil was not at his door waiting for copy—Scott's spirits drooped and his pen flagged, he dallied with what he was about, and lost the threads of his story. His poetry, of course, stands in a different category —that he frequently laboured, and wrote over two or three times; but all his novels were printed as they left his desk, with nothing more than a little revision at the hands of James Ballantyne, and a hasty glance at the proofs by Scott in odd half hours.

But with all this tendency to slipslop in his style, with all this haste and carelessness, all this want of preparation, allowing his pen to take its own course, and his plots to construct themselves, perhaps no great writer ever took more trouble about the substratum of his fiction and poetry. Even when building with rubble, his foundations were of adamant. His imagination was vivid and powerful, and the amplitude and accuracy of his memory were the marvel of all his friends. But he trusted nothing either to memory or imagination, when he could trace out the facts themselves by paying a visit to a scene, or by hunting up an old ballad or a tradition in a

library. Refusing to give ten minutes of his leisure to lay down the plot of a novel, he never hesitated a moment to give up the leisure of a week to settle a point of history, or to gather the details of a bit of scenery, which he was thinking of working into a poem or novel. Upon points like these he was, like Moore, almost finical. When at work upon "Quentin Durward," Lockhart frequently found him in the Advocate's Library at Edinburgh, poring over maps and gazetteers with care and anxiety; and his own letters to Ballantyne attest the scrupulous nicety with which he hunted up his facts, even for the description of a village like Plessis les Tours, consulting Malte Brun's geographical works, Wraxall's "History of France," and his "Travels," and even Philip de Comines. Most of his descriptions, too, like Byron's, are photographs; and with the "Lady of the Lake" or the "Lord of the Isles" in your hand, you may trace out every view that Scott had in his eye when penning them, with his dogs and his children at his knee, in the morning room at Ashestiel. He visited his friend Mr. Morritt, when he was at work upon "Rokeby," to refresh his recollections of the scene; and Mr. Morritt gives us a striking conversation that took place the morning after Scott's arrival, upon this characteristic of his compositions:—

"You have often given me materials for a romance," said Scott; "now I want a good robbers' cave, and an old church of the right sort." "We rode out," says Mr. Morritt, "in quest of these; and

he found what he wanted in the ancient slate quarries of Brignal and the ruined Abbey of Egglestone. I observed him noting down even the peculiar little wild flowers and herbs that accidentally grew round and on the side of a bold crag near his intended cave of Guy Denzil, and could not help saying that, as he was not to be upon oath in his work, daisies, violets, and primroses would be as poetical as any of the humble plants he was examining. I laughed, in short, at his scrupulousness; but I understood him when he replied, 'that in nature herself no two scenes are exactly alike, and that whoever copied truly what was before his eyes, would possess the same variety in his descriptions, and exhibit apparently an imagination as boundless as the range of nature in the scenes he recorded; whereas, whoever trusted to imagination, would soon find his own mind circumscribed and contracted to a few favourite images; and the repetition of these would sooner or later produce that very monotony and barrenness which had always haunted descriptive poetry in the hands of any but the patient worshippers of truth. Besides which,' he said, 'local names and peculiarities made a fictitious story look so much better in the face.'"

And this was the principle upon which Scott worked in all his poems and novels. It is the source of half their charm. And this apparently was what Goëthe had in his mind when, in reading one of Scott's novels to a group of friends at Weimar, he burst out with his remark upon its artistic skill and truth: "What infinite diligence in the preparatory studies! What truth of detail in the execution!" Of course, looking at the Scotch novels, as we do now, with a microscope, we are able to detect inaccuracies of costume and historical solecisms which the keenest and most accomplished of French and German critics must of necessity have missed. But these inaccuracies and violations of art are, after all,

but trifles; and even with these Goëthe's remark still represents the opinion of the highest and maturest spirit of criticism: "All is great in the 'Waverley Novels,' material, effect, characters, and execution." And the main source of their greatness lies in their truth to nature. The "Lady of the Lake" is, as a description of the Trossachs, superior to "Murray." Scott knew every goat path in the Bristled Territory long before he sat down to photograph it; and every goat knew the Sherra. But Scott revisited the Trossachs, as he revisited Rokeby and Liddesdale, to refresh and correct his recollections before he took his pen in hand. And what he did in the case of scenery, which he might have sketched in its broad outlines from memory with the exactitude of an Ordnance map, he did with his characters. They were none of them the creations of his own fancy. They are all drawn from life. Most of his sketches of the heroes of '15 and '45 are reproductions of his own personal recollections or of those of his friends; and characters like those of the Black Dwarf and Tod Gabbie were all characters that Scott had met with in his ballad-hunting rambles. Margaret Branksome, in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," is a photograph of Scott's first love; and Alan Fairford, in "Redgauntlet," is obviously intended as a portrait of himself. Under the thin disguise of Saunders Fairford we have a sketch of Scott's father, even down to the minutest details of his dress, his suit of snuff-coloured

brown, his silk stockings, his silver buckles, and his bob-wig and cocked hat; and in Darsie Latimer we have one of the dearest of Scott's companions in his youth, Mr. William Clerk. George Constable, a friend of Scott's father, sat for Jonathan Oldbuck; but as the original conception was developed, Scott "embroidered" Constable's character with many traits from his old friend, John Clerk of Eldin. Dominie Sampson, again, was a cross between Launcelot Whale, the master of the Grammar School at Kelso, an absent grotesque being, between six and seven feet high, and an old blue-gown who used to stand bleaching his head in the wind at the corner of one of the streets of Edinburgh, in order to raise enough to pay for his son's education for the ministry. Those who knew Scott, too, before he thought fit to avow the authorship of the Scotch novels, frequently tracked him in the snow of his own dialogue; for Scott's ear was as quick as his eye, and anything particularly striking or characteristic that happened to turn up in conversation generally found its way in one form or another into his works.

Reinforcing his imagination and his wit with recollections like these, and possessing wider and more diversified experience than probably any writer of fiction except Fielding, Scott dashed off his novels when he had once got into the thread of his narrative with astonishing fluency. "The manual labour alone of copying them," as Moore once said to him,

"seems enough to have occupied all the time that he took in producing them." "But I write very quick," was Scott's answer. "That comes of being brought up under an attorney." Even when his eyes were failing, and his fingers gouty, he frequently threw off thirty or forty pages of print before dinner—that, in fact, was his task when he was at work upon "Woodstock" and the "Life of Napoleon;" and till he had accomplished that, he did not think himself at liberty to take his axe and stroll out into the woods for an hour's sharp exercise. In his prime, he thought nothing of throwing off a novel in a month. "Guy Mannering" was written "in six weeks, about Christmas," and this, by itself, he thought easy work. Very frequently, however, Sir Walter had a brace of novels on hand together, or a novel and a poem, or two or three reviews for the *Edinburgh* or the *Quarterly*. "Ivanhoe" and the "Monastery" were written concurrently in this way; and Scott took up the story of "Woodstock" as a diversion to kill time when he was ahead of the press with his "Life of Napoleon."

Hasty work in literature is not generally the highest kind of work; and of course there is in all Sir Walter Scott's works much that is thin, and rambling, and vapid. But Sir Walter Scott's ideal in poetry and in prose was that "perpetual animation and elasticity of thought" which in his opinion formed the highest distinction of Dryden, and he

preferred ten times over to be unfinished rather than overfinished. The first sufficient words that presented themselves suited his purpose; and in his writing, as in his conversation, he never gave a second thought to those niceties of expression, those epigrammatic turns of thought, and that precision and polish of style by which men of inferior calibre eke out their genius, and now and then, as in the case of Pope, build up a reputation as high as that often attained by the most brilliant and diversified powers of originality. Perhaps no great writer has supplied us with fewer quotations than Scott. You may run off all his quotable passages on your fingers, and a single volume of Mr. Disraeli's contains more epigrams than the whole of the Scotch novels. This slap-dash style was, with Scott, partly the result of an impetuous temperament and partly the result of ingrained contempt for the work of the desk, except as the easiest way of earning £10,000 a year, and keeping up the position of a Scottish laird. What was good enough for the public was good enough for him; and his cardinal test of the value of his work was the price of its copyright and its sale. In poetry he wrote by inspiration, taking up his pen, like Byron, only when the fit was upon him, and even then he wrote, as he thought all poetry must be written to be worth anything, with anxious labour. But when at work upon a novel or a history, all he thought of was to get through his task; and if he

was not in the vein when he took up his pen, he simply wrote on, as he said, till he "wrote himself into good humour." This was not generally a very hard task; and when he had got into good humour with his work, he wrote on as freely and as gaily as he talked. His manuscripts testify sufficiently to this. In his poems you meet with stanzas that are hardly legible with blots and interlineations, particularly in the manuscript of "Rokeby," which was set up from the original draft, written on paper of various sorts and sizes; but the manuscripts of his novels are as free from everything of this description as his correspondence. You may turn over page after page without finding a single correction. "His thoughts," as his amanuensis said, "flowed easily and felicitously, without any difficulty to lay hold of them, or to find appropriate language. He sat in his chair (when dictating), from which he rose now and then, took a volume from the bookcase, consulted it, and restored it to the shelf—all without intermission in the current of ideas, which continued to be delivered with no less readiness than if his mind had been wholly occupied with the words he was uttering." When dialogue of peculiar animation was in progress, James Ballantyne says, Scott walked up and down the room, raising and lowering his voice, and, as it were, acting the parts. It was in this way that the greater part of the "Bride of Lammermoor," the whole of the "Legend of Montrose," and all but a

few pages of "Ivanhoe," were dictated from the sick sofa in the Abbotsford library, as Scott was recovering from his first illness.

The file-work Scott left to the printer: and of several of his stories, he did not even see the proofs till they were in the hands of the public. This was the case with the most finished and most poetical of all his novels, the first of the three which he dictated to "Single-song Laidlaw" and Ballantyne; and when it was put into his hands in its complete form he did not recollect one single incident, character, or conversation in it. It was all as fresh to him as it was to his readers, and fresher than it was to his amanuensis. With the exception of the "Lay," it is an open question whether he ever read any of his poems after they were published. He liked that better than he anticipated; but I do not think the perusal increased his opinion of the critical discernment of the public. He was "never fond of his own poetry," and placed Joanna Baillie far above him as a poet, as he did Jane Austen as a novelist. Burns and Byron he thought the most genuine men of genius of his time, and when Ballantyne told him that the "Lord of the Isles" and "Rokeby" were paling in the glare and glitter of "Childe Harold" and the "Giaour," he abandoned the laurel wreath to Byron without a struggle, and almost without a sigh. "Byron hits the mark where I don't even pretend to fledge my arrow. He beats me out of the field by his de-

scription of the strong passions and in deep-seated knowledge of the human heart." But with Burns's couplet upon his lips—

> "The mouse who only trusts to one poor hole
> Can never be a mouse of any soul —"

he turned to his abandoned MS. of "Waverley" with fresh vigour and determination to win in prose all that he was forfeiting in poetry; and when in their turn, the novels of the author of "Waverley" began to pall upon a taste which likes its fiction fresh and fresh, Scott left the field to his imitators, and turned to history. "There is but one way," he said, "if you wish to be read—you must strike out something novel to suit the humour of the hour;" and that was the principle by which he was governed all through his career. It was not a very lofty principle to act upon; with a weaker man it might have been a dangerous principle, ending, as in the case of Byron, in the complete demoralisation of his genius. In Scott, however, it led to nothing more than a variation of style. When he had flooded the market with Scottish legends, he took up those of France; "Quentin Durward" was hardly out of hand when he began to dream of trying his hand at the romantic legends of the Rhine. Lounging on his pony, with Lockhart and Laidlaw, one fine calm afternoon, along the brow of Eildon Hill, and looking down into

Melrose, Scott spoke of the "row" that was going on in Paris about his new novel, and added, "I can't but think that I could make better play still with something German." Laidlaw grumbled at this—"Nae, nae, sir! take my word for it you are always best, like Helen MacGregor, when your foot is on your native heath; and I have often thought that if you were to write a novel, and lay the scene here in the very year you were writing it, you would exceed yourself." "Hame's hame," answered Scott with a smile, "be it ever sae hamely. There's something in what you say, Willie. What, suppose I were to take Captain Clutterbuck for a hero, and never let the story step a yard beyond the village below us yonder?" "The very thing I want," said Laidlaw; "stick to Melrose in July, 1823." "Well, upon my word," Scott answered, "the field would be quite wide enough—and what for no?" He mused over Laidlaw's suggestion for a few moments; his air became graver and graver, and at length he added, half in soliloquy, "Aye, aye, if one could look into the heart of that little cluster of cottages, no fear but you would find materials enow for tragedy as well as comedy. I undertake to say there is some real romance at this moment going on down there, that if it could have justice done to it, would be well worth all the fiction that was ever spun out of human brains." This was the origin of "St. Ronan's Well." The story itself was written for the most

part in the course of a trip with Lockhart to Lanarkshire, and to the ruins in the upper regions of the Tweed and the Clyde. This was the first time that Lockhart had ever been out on the road with Scott; and he tells us the surprise with which Scott's literary diligence when away from home and from his books struck him. He was always at work. "Wherever we slept, whether in the noble mansion or in the shabbiest of country inns, and whether the work was done after retiring at night or before an early start in the morning, he very rarely mounted the carriage again without having a packet of the well-known aspect, ready sealed and corded, and addressed to his printer in Edinburgh. I used to suspect (Lockhart goes on to say) that he had adopted in his latter years the plan of writing everything on paper of the quarto form in place of the folio, which he at an earlier period used, chiefly because in this way, whatever he was writing, and wherever he wrote, he might seem to casual observers to be merely engaged upon a common letter, and the rapidity of his execution, taken with the shape of his sheet, has probably deceived hundreds; but when he had finished his two or three letters, 'St. Ronan's Well,' or whatever was in hand, had made a chapter in advance."

Throwing off his MS. in this rapid and careless style, tossing it into the post without a second glance, and reserving all his corrections till he saw how it read in type, I need hardly say that Sir Walter

Scott's proofs were the terror of his printers. He sent Dr. Lardner half wild with the MS. of his Scottish History. It was full of slips of the pen, of false grammar, of incomplete sentences, of repetitions and clumsinesses without end; and all these Scott corrected in his proofs, till the Doctor in sheer despair had to set a clerk at work to copy out the MS. and "make it read" before it was set. Yet this Scottish History was written, not in half hours stolen from the leisure of halting-places in the course of an antiquarian raid, but in the quiet of his solitary and luxurious Gothic study at Abbotsford. This was where Scott did all his best work, and it is still preserved with pious pride by Mr. Hope-Scott exactly as his distinguished kinsman left it when, with tears in his eyes, he laid down his pen for ever, and asked Lockhart to lead him back to his bedroom to listen once more to the murmur of the Tweed, and to die. It is a snug little room opening out of the splendid library in which Scott gathered one of the finest collections of books to be found in his day, but it is fitted up in the strictest sense of the term as a work-room—that is to say, it has but three articles of furniture: Sir Walter's desk—a small writing-table, a plain arm-chair covered with black leather, and a companion chair for the use of a privileged visitor now and then; and here, in this quiet little ingle nook of his library, we can still picture the Ariosto of the North, in his green velvet coat and plaid

trousers, with his vast pile of forehead, his deep grey eyes, and that smile of gentle enthusiasm which gleams out upon us in Phillips's portrait, with Maida at his feet and his staghounds asleep upon the hearth-rug, throwing off his morning task of "Woodstock" —can still hear the "dashing trot" of his pen over the paper, till, with a jerk of his hand, he brings his work to a close with the characteristic flourish which marks all his MSS., and lays down the wand by which he had held three generations of readers spell-bound under the glamour of his genius, without, as he said with a flush of pride, writing a single line to unsettle any man's faith, or to corrupt any man's principle, or a single line which on his death-bed he should wish to blot.

ROBERT BURNS.

SIR WILLIAM ALLAN has anticipated almost everything that can be said in the way of description by his vivid and picturesque sketch of Burns at work. He gives us the poet at his desk, and standing by his picture we have Burns before us—Burns the peasant in his native suit of hodden grey, the characteristic dress of an Ayrshire peasant, and Burns the poet, with his thoughtful face, his black brow, and his deep flashing eyes, Burns in the garret of the "auld clay biggin" at Mossgiel, where he wrote out most of his earlier poems. He holds his "auld stumpie pen" in his hand, and on his table is the MS. of his "Cottar's Saturday Night," or of his lines to the mouse whose "wee bit housie" he had turned up with his plough in the morning. The conception of the scene is in the highest degree picturesque. It is worthy at once of the poet and of the artist. In themselves the accessories of the picture are sufficiently humble, but Mr. Robert Chambers, who visited Mossgiel when preparing his edition of the "Life and Works of Burns," tells us, upon the authority of those who knew the cottage in Burns's youth, that Sir William Allan's conception of the scene where the Genius of Caledonia found the most

illustrious of her sons far exceeds the reality in point of dignity. The cottage still exists; and exists, one is glad to think, almost as it did in the days of Burns. It consists in the main of a kitchen and parlour, or spence, and it was in this spence that Burns sat—

"By the ingle cheek,
And eyed the spewing reek,
That filled wi' hoast-provoking smeek
The auld clay biggin;
And heard the restless rattons squeak
About the riggin',"

when Coila, the goddess of his inspiration—

"A tight outlandish hizzie braw,"

with her holly-bound brows and her flowing robes of tartan sheen, appeared in the vision to hail him as her own inspired bard, when, musing on his wasted time, how he had spent his youthful prime—

"And done nae thing
But stringin' blethers up in rhyme
For fools to sing;"

he was muttering to himself "some rash aith" to be henceforth "rhyme proof till his last breath." Almost the only other apartment in the house is a garret reached by a trap door, and lighted by three or four panes of glass set in the slanting roof. Here Burns

and his brother Gilbert slept together. Under the window the poet had a little deal table, in which there was a drawer. It was here he transcribed the verses which, for the most part, he had composed in the fields; and his youngest sister used to steal up into this garret after the poet had returned to his work in the afternoon, to search the drawer for the verses which he had just thrown off, an epistle to Lapraik, a skit on the "Auld Light Divines," or his last love ditty.

"The first of my poetic-offspring that saw the light," Burns says in his autobiography, "was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my 'Holy Fair.' I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but to prevent the worst I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of such things, and told him I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause." This was the "Twa Herds." It was written, or at least may be presumed to have been written, early in 1784, and, circulating from hand to hand, it brought Burns into some sort of note as "a maker of rhymes." "Holy Willie's Prayer," "The Ordination," and "The Holy Fair" followed in rapid succession; and the sensation produced by these caustic and brilliant strokes of satire in the theological circles of Mossgiel taught

Burns to explore the recesses of his mind and to bring the powers of his genius to the test of composition. How, possessing the rich and varied gifts which these satires reveal in the most vivid light, Burns should have passed twenty-six years of his life, like Homer's Cyclops, blindly groping around the walls of his cave, and should now be complaining helplessly of living without an aim in life, is one of those mysteries in the development of genius which even genius itself cannot explain. Yet this is the fact, and, if we may trust his brother Gilbert, it was not till the summer of 1784 that the thought of becoming an author entered his head. The two brothers happened, in the interval of hard labour, to be weeding the garden; and to kill the time Robert repeated the greater part of his "Epistle to Davie." "I was much pleased with the Epistle," says Gilbert, "and said to him I was of opinion it would bear being printed, and that it would be well received by people of taste; that I thought it at least equal, if not superior, to many of Allan Ramsay's epistles; that the merit of these, and much other Scotch poetry, seemed to consist principally in the knack of the expression; but here there was a strain of interesting sentiment, and the Scotticism of the language scarcely seemed affected, but appeared to be the natural language of the poet; that, besides, there was certainly some novelty in a poet pointing out the consolations that were in store for him when he should go

a-begging. Robert seemed very well pleased with my criticisms, and we talked of sending it to some magazine; but as this plan afforded no opportunity of knowing how it would take, the idea was dropped." The idea of publishing once started, Burns set to work with his pen, and in the course of about fifteen months produced the splendid series of lyrics which have placed him in the first rank of original poets. This was the most active and, perhaps, taking it all in all, the richest and most brilliant period in the literary history of Burns, and through his own diaries and correspondence, and his brother Gilbert's notes, we may trace the composition of most of the masterpieces of his first volume.

"I compose hastily," said Burns, chatting about his poems with Cromek, "but correct laboriously;" and that sentence condenses all that we know of the poet's habits of thought. A trifle set him off, as it did Byron and Wordsworth—a broken daisy lying in the furrow of his plough, a mouse turned out of its "wee bit housie, all in ruin," the picture of a man asking for work, the recollection of an old ballad, a line in Ramsay or Ferguson, or the contemplation of a scene of family worship in the cottage of a peasant. And when the idea had once sunk into his mind, he brooded over it till it took form and shape in a poetic creation. This, generally, is the history of his poems. His "Address to the Deil," for instance, was suggested, Gilbert tells us, "by running over in his

mind the many ludicrous accounts and representations we have, from various quarters, of this august personage." Reading Ferguson's "Farmer's Ingle," and contemplating the scenes of domestic worship which constitute one of the most characteristic incidents in the cottage life of Scotland, suggested the "Cottar's Saturday Night." Robert had frequently remarked to him, says Gilbert, "that he thought there was something peculiarly venerable in the phrase, 'Let us worship God,' used by a decent, sober head of a family, introducing family worship." And one Sunday afternoon, when they happened to be walking together, Robert electrified his brother by his recitation of the "Cottar's Saturday Night." The picture of a peasant,

> "Abject, mean, and vile,
> Who begs a brother of the earth
> To give him leave to toil,"

which forms the groundwork of the dirge, "Man was made to Mourn," was one that Burns had often spoken to his brother upon, as, to him, a most mortifying picture of human life; and one can easily conceive him brooding over this sentiment,

> "One evening as I wandered forth
> Along the banks of Ayr."

Burns needed only the suggestion of a peasant, "weary, worn with care," to throw off his dirge. In composing this poem, however, Burns, as usual,

borrowed many hints from an ancient ballad, "The Life and Age of Man," which his mother had often sung to an old grand-uncle in the ingle nook. Those exquisitely beautiful idylls upon the mountain daisy and the field mouse are the inspiration of the moment. The dew is still upon them. His gaudsman had, sixty years afterwards, a distinct recollection of the poet turning up the mouse. The plough-boy ran after the creature to kill it, but was checked and recalled by his master; who, he observed, thereafter became thoughtful and abstracted. "Death and Dr. Hornbook" arose out of a quarrel which Burns had at a Masons' Lodge at Tarbolton, with a village grocer with a turn for therapeutics, who had added a few medicines to his stock of grocery, and proposed to give "advice in common disorders at the shop gratis." The poor dominie had apparently excited Burns's ire at the Masons' Lodge by boasting a little too much of his medical skill, and returning home that night Burns conceived, and partly composed, his poem of "Death and Dr. Hornbook." "These circumstances," adds Gilbert, "he related when he repeated the verses to me next afternoon, as I was holding the plough, and he was letting the water off the field beside me."

Thought out at the plough and in his evening strolls on the banks of the Ayr—for Burns, like the poet of Rydal Mount, held that no poet ever found the muse,

"Till by himsel he learned to wander
Adown some trotting burn's meander,
And no think lang—"

Burns rarely committed his verses to paper till they had been thoroughly conned over in his own mind. "Holding the plough," Gilbert says, "was a favourite situation with Robert for poetic composition, and some of his best verses were produced while he was at that exercise." But we know, too, from his own confession, how sweet he thought it in the gloaming—

"To stray and pensive ponder
A heartfelt song."

Burns composed generally, like Wordsworth, without any regular plan. A thought struck him, and if in turning over this thought he hit on two or three stanzas to please him, he then cast about for proper introductory, connecting, and concluding stanzas; hence the middle of a poem was often the part to be first produced. But knowing what we do of his conversational powers, and of the terseness, fluency, and felicity of his poetic diction, we should assume for ourselves, without the authority of his "Epistle to Davie," that Burns was rarely at a loss for apt and picturesque expressions to clothe his thoughts, when his muse was "once fairly liet." He frequently had half-a-dozen or more pieces of one sort and another hon and: a satire, a song, or a pastoral poem, which

he took up in turn, according to the momentary impulse of his mind, dismissing the work when it bordered on fatigue; and in his seasons of inspiration rhyming was, as he tells us in his own vivid dialect—

> "Amaist his only pleasure,
> At hame, afiel' at wark, or leisure;
> The Muse, poor hizzie!
> Though rough and raploch be her measure,
> She's seldom lazy."

To say that these seasons of inspiration were regulated by the almanack is, perhaps, to adopt an ambiguous form of expression. Yet this is literally the fact. In the spring and summer Burns scarcely ever wrote anything; nothing, I believe, with one striking exception, that adds the slightest lustre to his fame. His verse, like Milton's, flowed best from the autumnal equinox to the vernal. "Autumn," he used to say, "is my propitious season, and I make more verses in it than in all the year else;" and it is curiously perplexing to find him year after year tuning his lyre as the leaves begin to fall, pouring out a flood-stream of poetry for three or four months, and then with the turn of the year laying aside his "auld stumpie pen" for five or six months. He took peculiar pleasure in winter.

> "The winter's bleak has charms to me,
> When winds rave through the naked tree;

Or frosts on hills of Ochiltree,
Are hoary gray:
Or blinding drifts wild furious flee,
Dark'ning the day!"

He explained this *penchant* partly by the melancholy cast of his mind; but analysing his feelings in his diary, he says there is still something, "even in the

'Mighty tempest, and the hoary waste,
Abrupt and deep, stretched o'er the buried earth,'

which raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favourable to everything great and noble. There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion; my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who, in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, 'walks on the wings of the winds.'"

It was in one of these seasons that he composed his dirge on Winter, and the "Gloomy night is gath'ring fast." A special interest attaches to this piece inasmuch as at the time it was thrown off Burns believed that it was the last song he should ever measure in Caledonia. He was returning from St.

Margaret's Hill on Irvine Water, a day or two before his anticipated voyage to the West Indies. He had a wide stretch of moor to pass on his way home, and on this he composed his lines. "The aspect of Nature," he told Professor Walker afterwards at Edinburgh, "harmonised with his feelings. It was a lowering and heavy evening in the last of autumn. The wind was up, and whistled through the rushes and long spear-grass, which bent before it. The clouds were driving across the sky; and cold, pelting showers at intervals added discomfort of body to cheerlessness of mind." Bruce's Address to his Army at Bannockburn is generally supposed to owe its inspiration to a similar scene. But there is a schism among the biographers and critics upon the point. Burns in sending the MS. to Thomson gives this account of its origin:—"There is a tradition which I have met with in many places in Scotland that the old air 'Hey tuttie taitie' (an air which often filled his eyes with tears) was 'Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn.' This thought, in my yesternight's evening walk, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning." The date of this note is 1793. But Mr. Syme, in his account of the "Galoway Excursion" with Burns in the previous July,

gives, apparently upon the direct authority of the poet, a very circumstantial account of its composition in a storm on the wilds of Kenmure. "We left Kenmure and went to Gatehouse"—this is Mr. Syme's note in his diary—"I took him the moor road, where savage and desolate regions extend wide around. The sky was sympathetic with the wretchedness of the soil; it became lowering and dark. The hollow winds sighed, the lightnings gleamed, the thunder rolled. The poet enjoyed the awful scene; he spoke not a word, but seemed rapt in meditation. . . . What do you think he was about? He was charging the English army, along with Bruce, at Bannockburn. He was engaged in the same manner on our ride home from St. Mary's Isle, and I did not disturb him. Next day he produced me the address of Bruce to his troops, and gave me a copy for Dalzell." I have not the presumption to say how these accounts are to be read together. Dr. Currie got over the difficulty by a pious fraud. He altered the wording of Burns's note to Thomson. Mr. Robert Chambers restored the original reading, and, adhering to the letter of Burns's version, threw out the suggestion that probably Syme "misapplied circumstances and dates." Of course that is possible. And yet, looking at the general tone of his narrative, its minuteness in point of detail, its local colouring, the striking nature of the scene and of its associations, I do not see how a man whose memory upon every

other point is singularly vivid should be under an hallucination of this kind upon the only incident of the least literary interest that distinguished his excursion with the poet, and especially upon such an incident as this, for the poet, he says, gave him a copy of his ode as a memento of their trip. Balancing the evidence as best I can, looking at the looseness of phrase which sometimes marked Burns's own account of the composition of his pieces, my impression is that Syme is in the main correct in his account, and that Burns, thoughtlessly perhaps, threw a little mystification about the composition of his ode to avoid what he may have thought a tedious explanation, when, in point of fact, all he had done in his "evening's walk" had been to hum over his noble war song afresh, perhaps to add a verse or two to it, under the inspiration of the French Revolution, and to fit it to the air of "Hey tuttie taittie." And I am strengthened in this impression, first by the terms in which Burns speaks of the air in the postscript of his note, and by a suggestive entry in his diary of the thoughts suggested by his visit to Bannockburn. "Here no Scot," he says, "can pass uninterested. I fancy to myself that I see my gallant countrymen coming over the hill, and down upon the plunderers of their country, the murderers of their fathers, noble revenge and just hate glowing in every vein; striding more and more eagerly as they approach the oppressive, insulting, blood-thirsty foe. I see them meet

in glorious triumphant congratulation on the victorious field, exulting in their heroic royal leader and rescued liberty and independence." That was written in the autumn of 1787; and knowing what we do of Burns's enthusiastic admiration of the Bruce, no one can read these glowing sentences without tracing in them the germ thought of his ode. A scene like that pictured by Mr. Syme was exactly the scene to stir Burns's imagination to its depths, and to bring out his conception in its noblest form. The air was an old and a favourite one of Burns; and he had often apparently hummed it over in his mind with the wish to fit it with a song worthy of its music. He tells Thomson in the postscript to his note that he had shown it to Urbani. "He was," Burns says, "highly pleased with it, and begged me to make soft verses for it, but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same nature *not quite so ancient,* roused my rhyming mania." The final phrase of this sentence of Burns is, I know, an embarrassing one; but recollecting how Burns spoke of having just finished "Tam o' Shanter" in a note to Cunningham three or four months after it was written, I do not think we ought to allow a single phrase to deter us from accepting an account which has so much to authenticate it as Syme's. Adopting

either reason, however, we have in this ode, one of the most heroic and soul-stirring in the dialects of the British isles, a striking illustration of Burns's power of translating his thoughts into the most vivid and energetic form of expression when anything touched the highest chords of his genius and of his strong sympathy with Nature in her wildest and most tumultuous moods.

Perhaps in illustration of both these traits I may here note Burns's habit of composing, like Scott, on horseback. He threw off the "Chevalier's Lament," for instance, when riding alone one Sunday afternoon "through a tract of melancholy, joyless muirs between Galloway and Ayrshire," and humming over his favourite air of "Captain O'Kean," as a relief to the psalms and hymns which kept running in his thoughts. "Willie's Awa" was thought out, too, apparently, in the course of a miserably wet day's ride from Melrose to Selkirk, for it was written "nearly extempore at a solitary inn in Selkirk," where Burns was waiting for his dinner almost "jaded to death." Except, however, in cases of this kind, Burns's favourite hours of thought and composition —the hours, that is, when his mind was most active, were those of twilight. Now and then, perhaps, you may find him giving up a day to poetry, as in the case of "Tam o' Shanter." This was the work of a long day in the autumn of 1789, at Elliesland, and it was written, as I need hardly say, to preserve a

grotesque Ayrshire legend in its most vivid and picturesque form for Captain Grose, the

> "Fine, fat, fodgel wight,
> Of stature short, but genius bright;"

whom Burns has immortalised in the lines—

> "Hear, Land o' Cakes and brither Scots
> Frae Maidenkirk to John o' Groats,
> A chiel's amang ye takin' notes."

Burns was fond of telling this story to visitors over a glass of whisky; and Grose wished him to throw it into verse. "Tam o' Shanter" was the result. Thinking over the Captain's request, Burns strolled out to his favourite walk on the banks of the Nith one morning after breakfast, and spent nearly all the day there, pacing up and down. Here, in the afternoon, his wife found him when out for a walk with her children. "He was busily engaged *crooning to himself,*" and Mrs. Burns, perceiving that her presence was an interruption, loitered behind with her little ones among the broom. Her attention was presently attracted by the strange and wild gesticulations of the bard, who, now at some distance, was agonised with an ungovernable access of joy. He was reciting in a loud voice, and with tears rolling down his cheeks, those animated verses which he had just conceived:—

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"Now, Tam! O Tam, had thae been queans
A' plump and strappin' in their teens,
Their sarks, instead of creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen-hunder linen!
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' good blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!"

But this is the only instance I can recall of Burns breaking into the working hours of the day for the sake of poetry. When he had an idea which he wished to turn into rhyme he preferred to have "a gloamin' shot at the Muses," and towards the close of the year Burns was to be seen striding alone on a precipice overhanging the Nith, especially when the winds were high and the stream swollen and turbulent. It was here that his verses on the "Wounded Hare" were composed. James Thomson, son of the occupier of a farm adjoining Elliesland, told Allan Cunningham that it was he who wounded poor puss. "Burns," he said, "was in the custom, when at home, of strolling by himself in the twilight every evening along the Nith, and by the *march* between his land and ours. The hares often came and nibbled our wheat-braird; and once, in the gloaming—it was in April—I got a shot at one and wounded her; she ran bleeding by Burns, who was pacing up and down by himself, not far from me. He started, and with a bitter curse ordered me out of his sight, or he would throw me instantly into the Nith; and

had I stayed I'll warrant he would have been as good as his word, though I was both young and strong."

These habits of contemplation, of reverie, and of composition were continued at Dumfries. Here his favourite walk was a "hazelly path" along the banks of the Nith, leading to the ruins of Lincluden Abbey. These ruins stand at the head of a tongue of land formed by the Nith and Cluden water, and form the centre of an amphitheatre of the most beautiful and diversified scenery. Those who do not know the spot may form at least a vague conception of its loveliness by the hints which the poet himself has thrown out in his "Vision." The ruins themselves are of the most picturesque description; and in Burns's time were apparently in a fine state of preservation. They are still distinguished by many noble fragments of architecture, particularly by the remains of what we may perhaps assume to have been the Calvary of the Abbey Church. Through the trellised windows of this chapel the eye takes in bits of landscape which are hardly to be equalled even in the Highlands, the native region of the picturesque.

"This noble pile of ruins, this roofless tower,
Where the wa'flower scents the dewy air,
Where th' howlet mourns in her ivy bower,
And tells the midnight moon her care,"—

was the scene of most of Burns's lonely musing hours at Dumfries; and the mount which has been distinguished as the Calvary of the ancient Church was the spot which the poet selected to hold special converse with the goddess of his inspiration. It was here that the "Vision" was composed, and composed in all probability when—

"The fox was howling on the hill;"

for Burns often lingered among these ruins till far into the night, especially on bright starlight nights, when—

"The winds were laid, the air was still;"

and the stream—

'Was rushing by the ruined wa's."

The poet found a shorter walk along the north side of the Nith towards Martington ford. This, like the walk to the Abbey, takes in a magnificent sweep of scenery, commands a view of the hills and of the towers of Lincluden, and afforded, what the poet valued almost as much as ruins themselves, soft greensward banks to stretch himself upon, and listen to the distant roaring swells and falls, and—

" Mark the sweet flowers as they spring."

Here, in the autumn evenings of 1793 and 1794, Burns threw off most of those exquisite lyrics upon which his popularity, if not perhaps his fame, will chiefly rest. In sweetness, in strength, in music, and in pathos, these sparkling idylls have never been surpassed, and only in two or three cases equalled; and when everything else in the literature of Scotland shall have perished, everything but the recollection of her valour and her genius, and when the songs of Burns shall be remembered only, like the ancient Spanish ballads, as Iliads without an Homer, they will still be sufficient in themselves to preserve the dialect of Ayr and her sister shires from the fate of that of Cornwall, even if the day should ever come when the dialect of Burns shall cease to be the language of any but a group of shepherds in the remotest glens of the Highlands, and of a few fishermen on the shores of the Orkneys.

Of the mass of these songs we may trace the composition in Burns's notes to Thomson, almost stanza by stanza. They were generally, like the ode of Bannockburn, the suggestion of an old Scots' air that had struck the poet at a revel, on the roadside, or in the musings of his wife singing her children to sleep. He felt peculiar pleasure, he tells us, whenever he met with a song with a factious idea in it, in following out the idea for a verse or two. "My way," he says, "is this: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression, then

choose my theme; begin one stanza. When that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me that are in unison and harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom; humming every now and then the air, with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fireside of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures as my pen goes on. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably my way." And a score of instances are clustering round the tip of my pen in illustration of this. One or two, however, must suffice. "I walked out yesterday evening," he says, "with a volume of the *Museum* in my hand, when, turning up 'Allan Water,' 'What numbers shall the muse repeat,' &c.; as the words appeared to me rather unworthy of so fine an air, and recollecting that it is on your list, I sat and raved under the shade of an old thorn, till I wrote one to suit the measure." "That crinkum crankum tune, 'Robin Adair,' has run so in my head, and I succeeded so ill in my last attempt, that I have ventured in this morning's walk one essay more. You will remember an unfortunate part of our worthy friend Cunningham's story, which happened about three years ago. That struck my fancy, and I endeavoured to do the

idea justice." "I am just now making verses for 'Rothemurchie's Rant,' an air which puts me in raptures; and, in fact, unless I be pleased with the tune I never can make verses to it."

These lyrics of Burns, like Shakespeare's sonnets, are mostly drawn from the poet's own personal experience. They are, so to speak, the monograms of his soul. Every one of them marks a fresh development in "the heart of the man and the fancy of the poet"—the two grand considerations for which Burns professed to live—and in them you may trace all his *affaires de cœur*, and every variation of light and shade in his temperament; for no man, not even Byron, ever wrote more under the influence of impulse and passion; and these lyrics represent the spontaneous emotions of his heart. Of course, like Shakespeare, Goëthe, Byron, and Tasso—like almost every man, in fact, who has distinguished himself in art and poetry—Burns often replenished the lamp of his genius at others' altars; and all through his works you may trace the influence of the old race of Scottish minstrels, of Allan Ramsay, of Ferguson, and now and then even of his own contemporaries in song. But most of the charges of plagiarism that have been brought against Burns were, I believe, purely imaginary, as imaginary as the suspicious resemblance which a keen critic of the *Fortnightly Review* recently discovered between a striking line of Æschylus and the verses of a rustic English bard

who could not probably distinguish Greek from Cherokee; for Burns, like Goëthe, felt no false shame about avowing his obligations, such as they were, and appropriated thoughts, illustrations, and images wherever he found them, in sovereign contempt of all the critics in the world. That famous couplet in Bruce's ode, for instance,

> "Tyrants fall in every foe!
> Liberty's in every blow!"

is an appropriation from the common stall edition of Wallace:—

> "A false usurper sinks in every foe,
> And liberty returns with every blow,"

—a couplet which Burns thought worthy of Homer. The oft-quoted lines, again, in "Green grow the Rashes"—

> "Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
> And then she made the lasses, O!"

are the reproduction of a thought which occurs in an apostrophe to woman in an old comedy, which probably fell into the hands of Burns:—

> "Man was made when Nature was
> But an apprentice, but woman when she
> Was a skilful mistress of her art."

In the early part of his life, Allan Ramsay and Ferguson were his constant companions. A collection of Scottish songs was his *vade mecum* to poetry.

"I pored over them," he says in his autobiographic memoranda, "driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noticing the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation or fustian; and I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is." "The elegantly melting Gray" was his model of style afterwards, and traces of the author of the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" are frequently to be met with in the poems of his first volume. At Elliesland he generally carried a pocket edition of Milton with him when out on excise duty, and in his later years Milton was replaced by Cowper's "Task" as the companion of his solitary walks. Reading these books as Burns did, often making their thoughts his own, by his intense powers of appreciation, it would have been almost a miracle had not coincidences between his own train of thought and theirs now and then cropped up. The surprise to me, and to most people, I presume, is that they are not more numerous and striking than they are; for in fact Burns's obligations of this kind are, after all, very trifling, and what Burns borrowed he generally repaid with usury. Like Glaucus, he gave gold for brass. The mainspring of his inspiration lay after all in his own deep passionate heart, and in his own intense sympathy with nature; for he combined the exquisite sensibilities of a woman with the passions of ten men. A walk by the sheltered side of a wood on

a cloudy winter day, the stormy wind howling among the trees, enraptured him. He never entered a Druidical circle of stones without saying his prayers. He never heard the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild musing cadence of a troop of grey plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry; and, as in the case of Byron, the slightest hint was enough to set his fancy and imagination at work. Once lighted up, his passions, like Shelley's, raged, to use his own expression, like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme, and the conning over of his verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet. "I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were in a manner the spontaneous language of my heart."

This was at fifteen or sixteen, and music and love continued all through his life to be the main sources of his poetic inspiration. To "south the tune" of an old Scotch air, to dream of his bonnie Jean, or of Mary in Heaven, was with Burns always "the readiest way to catch the inspiration, and raise the bard into that glorious enthusiasm so strongly characteristic of our old Scotch poetry." Repeating odd verses of these old Scotch ballads, he says in a note in his diary, "has lighted up my flame a thousand times." "Whenever I want to be more than ordinary in song," he tells Thomson, "to be in some

degree equal to your diviner airs—do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? *Tout au contraire!* I have a glorious recipe; the very one that, for his own use was invented by the divinity of healing and poetry when erst he passed to the flocks of Admetus. I put myself on a regimen of admiring a fine woman; and in proportion to the adorability of her charms, in proportion you are delighted with my verses. The lightning of her eye is the godhead of Parnassus, and the witchery of her smile the divinity of Helicon!" And all Burns's best idylls and songs were thrown off in these fictitious reveries of passion, and thrown off generally, I may add, in a flood of inspiration in the course of a walk returning from a visit to one of these goddesses of his imagination, when strolling on the banks of a trotting burn, or, often, in two or three turns round his room; for Burns was never at a loss for apt and vivid words when he was not at a loss for thoughts. Perhaps now and then you may find him halting for a verse or beating about the bush for a thought, but this is very rare, and all his best pieces were composed with remarkable fluency, and written out often without a single alteration or correction. "The Deil's run awa' with the Exciseman," for instance, was composed offhand in two or three strides among the reeds and shingle of a wet salt marsh, to kill an idle hour, when the poet and two or three companions were lying in ambush to watch a suspicious-looking

brig in the Solway Firth. "Death and Dr. Hornbook" was thought out on the road from Tarbolton to Mossgiel, and the tradition runs that the poet in his reverie fell asleep on the parapet of a bridge after the composition of the piece, and when awakened by the morning sun, brushed up his recollections, and committed the ballad to paper on reaching his cottage.

Perhaps, however, the most striking illustration of Burns's powers of composition is to be found in the case of the ballad "To Mary in Heaven," the noblest of all his ballads. This was written in September, 1789, on the anniversary of the day on which Burns heard of the death of his early love, Mary Campbell, and, according to Mrs. Burns, the poet spent the day, though labouring under a cold, in the usual work of his harvest, and apparently in excellent spirits. But as the twilight deepened he appeared to grow "very sad about something," and at length wandered out into the barnyard. Here, in her anxiety about his health, for a sharp frost had set in, Mrs. Burns followed him, entreating him to return to the fireside. On being again and again requested to do so, he always promised compliance, but still remained where he was, striding up and down slowly and contemplating the sky, which was singularly clear and starry. At last Mrs. Burns found him stretched on a mass of straw, with his eyes fixed on a beautiful planet "that shone like another moon," and prevailed

on him to come in. Entering the house, he called for his desk, and wrote exactly as they now stand, with all the ease of one copying from memory, the sublime and pathetic verses,—

> "Thou lingering star, with lessening ray,
> That lovest to greet the early morn,
> Again thou usherest in the day
> My Mary from my soul was torn.
>
> "O Mary! dear departed shade,
> Where is thy place of blissful rest?
> See'st thou thy lover lowly laid,
> Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

And as Burns wrote this, he wrote most of his lyrics. The only things that bored him were his English compositions. "These," he says, "gravel me to death;" and according to Mrs. Burns most of them were written several times over. He "had plenty of excise paper, and scrawled away," with his children prattling at his knees; for, like Sydney Smith, Burns had no study of his own, but sat down at the close of the day at his plain, iron-rimmed desk standing in the recess of his cottage-window, with a quire of official foolscap for his pad, and threw off his songs to the music of his children's voices and his wife's spinning jennet by the fire. Using his own native dialect, Burns wrote as if

> "Phœbus and the famous nine
> Were glow'rin' owre his pen."

But when he entered into rivalry with Dr. Beattie he lost all his fluency, all his ease, and all his vigour;

haggled over a phrase in the fashion of "the elegantly melting Gray," and recast his verses line by line, word by word. But no Scot ever regrets this. Had Burns been as great a master of English as Byron, he might have won a wider popularity. But probably in proportion as his popularity had been wider spread, it would have been less intense. Burns's English difficulties threw him back upon the dialect of ploughboys and milkmaids in the wildest parts of Scotland; and his Scottish songs are, as Campbell said, the *elixir vitæ* of their dialect.

CHARLES LAMB.

OF CHARLES LAMB personally, of his dress, his style, his conversation, we know more than we know of any of his contemporaries. His slight, spare figure, his spindle legs—Tom Hood said they were immaterial—his head, which Leigh Hunt thought worthy of Aristotle, his pile of forehead, his curved nose, his hazel eye, sparkling with wit, and his half playful, half melancholy smile, have been noted in a dozen sketches; and with the help of these nothing is easier than to picture to ourselves the author of the "Essays of *Elia*," in his black dress, the proper costume, as he thought, of an author, with his shuffling gait—"a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel"—hurrying along Cheapside and Fleet Street from the India House to the Temple, between four or five in the afternoon, looking in at the office of Barry Cornwall or of Talfourd to stutter out an invitation to supper, to play a rubber of whist, to smoke a pipe, or to hear Coleridge talk metaphysics over a glass of grog, or Wordsworth recite his poetry, under the inspiration of a glass of water. And those pleasant social gather-

ings of his in his Temple Chambers, how vividly they reproduce themselves as we glance through the pages of *Elia!* His low-roofed rooms, in Inner Temple Lane, with their smoke-begrimed ceilings, their prints of Titian, Leonardo da Vinci, and Hogarth in black frames, his old, high-backed chairs, and his long plain book cases filled with moth-eaten folios of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, all tossed together, are as well-known to us as the furniture, books, and pictures of our own rooms; and the imagination, without an effort, re-peoples these rooms with the old familiar forms,—Coleridge with his splendid head, his large grey eyes, and his musical voice, looking, as Lamb said, like an archangel a little damaged; the tall gaunt form of Wordsworth, with a green shade over his eyes; Godwin, the author of the most sensational works of his day, with his thin voice and finical manners, but with a head that Chantry might have chiselled; Tom Barnes, the Editor of the *Times*, an able and accomplished man, but of quiet reserved manners, and apparently sluggish disposition, with hardly ten words to say away from his own table, or his desk in Printing House Square; Hazlitt, with his critical, contentious tongue, and his slouching gait; Leigh Hunt, with his flowing locks and benevolent smile; the gaunt form of George Dyer, looking, with his short trousers and his dark grey eyes glistening with faith and

wonder, more like a gawky and half-witted schoolboy than a poet; Charles Kemble, with his majestic air; Talfourd, The Crabbe, Liston, Burney—the Burney whom Lamb has immortalised by his *mot*—"If dirt was trumps, what a hand you would have, Michael!" —and Mary Lamb, the very soul of good nature, with her old-fashioned dress, and her capacious cap looking with a half-humorous, half-reproachful expression at her brother as he lays down his cards to mix his second tumbler.

But of Charles Lamb as an author, of Charles Lamb at his desk, we know less than we know even of Coleridge.

Here and there in his letters we come across a hint as to when and where this or that sonnet was written. Thus the verses "To my Sister" were written, as he tells Coleridge, in one of his lucid intervals in the course of six weeks which he "spent very agreeably in a mad house at Hoxton" about the beginning of 1796. The verses opening with the line "The Lord of Light shakes off his drowsy-hed" were written during a walk down into Hertfordshire; and

"When last I roved these winding wood-walks green"

was written "within a day or two of the last, on revisiting a spot where the scene was laid of my first sonnet, 'that mocked my step with many a lonely glade!'

The sonnet, "We were two pretty babies," a sonnet that he valued more than any of these trifles which were thrown off under the inspiration of Cowley in his summer strolls, was composed in "that very wood I had in mind when I wrote 'Methinks how dainty sweet;'" and Cowley's exquisite "Elegy on the death of his friend Harvey" suggested the phrase of "we two."

> "Was there a tree that did not know
> The love betwixt us two?"

Most of these sonnets were inspired partly by the recollection of Coleridge's eloquence in the quiet little sanded parlour at the "Salutation and Cat," and partly by Lamb's own passion for "the fair-haired maid" of Islington, whose shadow now and then flits across the page of Lamb's correspondence; and apart from any merits of their own, every lover of Charles Lamb will prize these versicles, as we prize those of Shakespeare and of Milton, because in them, more than in any other of his writings, we have the reflection of the man, of his thoughts, and his feelings, and the dream of his passions in the dawn of his life. It was on this account, and indeed on this account alone, that Lamb thought them worth preservation. "I love my sonnets," he says, protesting against some of Coleridge's emendations, "I love my sonnets because they are the reflected images of my own feelings at different times. To instance, in the

thirteenth—'How reason reeled,' &c.—are good lines, but must spoil the whole with me, who know it is only a fiction of yours, and that the 'rude dashings' in fact did not rock me to repose.' I grant the same objection applies not to the former sonnet; but still I love my own feelings; they are dear to memory, though they now and then wake a sigh or a tear."

But with the exception of hints like these it is surprising how little we can trace the hand of Charles Lamb in his essays and farces. We know all his favourite books as well as we know our own. We can take down one by one all those "ragged veterans" which he treasured so affectionately. We can turn to the open page in the Life of Sir Philip Sydney where he laid down his book, with the corner of the leaf doubled down, "for ever." But where are the MSS. of his contributions to the *Reflector* and the *London Magazine?* When, where, and how did he write the Essays of *Elia?* Questions like these we ask and ask in vain; for Lamb, like Handel, kept a lock and key on his desk, shut himself up when he was at work, gave orders to his maid that he was not at home, and, unlike Sheridan, guarded against the inquisitive eye of his biographer by burning all his rough drafts, if he had any, all his first attempts, and all his unfinished essays and plays.

We have, however, one compensation for this loss, and that is, the article on "Newspapers Thirty-five years Ago." That article contains a striking and

vivid sketch of Charles Lamb at work, when—to use his own expression—he was making his "first callow flights in authorship," writing "John Woodvil;" "hitting off a few lines almost extempore" in imitation of Burton; and conjuring "visionary guineas, the deceitful wages of unborn scandal," by scribbling pasquinades on "Mr. Pitt, Mr. Wilberforce, Mrs. Fitzherbert, the Devil, &c," to add a trifle to an income then barely sufficient for the decent support of himself and his sister, in their Chancery Lane garret. "In those days," says Lamb, speaking of the first years of the century, "every Morning Paper, as an essential retainer to its establishment, kept an author, who was bound to furnish daily a quantum of witty paragraphs. Sixpence a joke—and it was thought pretty high too—was Dan Stuart's settled remuneration in these cases. The chat of the day, scandal, but above all dress, furnished the material. The length of no paragraph was to exceed seven lines, shorter they might be, but they must be poignant." Through the influence of Coleridge with Dan Stuart, "one of the finest tempered of editors, frank, plain and English all over," Charles Lamb had been installed as Chief Jester of the *Morning Post*. It was his duty in that capacity to send in a half-a-dozen jokes a day; and a fashion of flesh, or rather pink-coloured hose for the ladies, luckily coming up at the juncture when Lamb entered upon his probation, established his reputation at once in that line. He was pro-

nounced "a capital hand." "Oh, the conceits which we varied upon *red* in all its prismatic differences! From the trite and obvious flower of Cytherea to the flaming costume of the lady that has her sitting upon 'many waters.' Then there was the collateral topic of ankles. What an occasion to a truly chaste writer, like ourself of touching that nice brink, and yet never tumbling over it, of a seemingly ever approximating something 'not quite proper;' while, like a skilful posture-master, balancing betwixt decorums and their opposites, he keeps the line, from which a hair's-breadth deviation is destruction; hovering in the confines of light and darkness, or where 'both seem either;' a hazy uncertain delicacy; Autolycus-like in the play, still putting off his expectant auditory with—'Whoop, do me no harm, good man!'" The fashion, however, did not last. "The ankles of our fair friends in a few weeks began to reassume their whiteness, and left us scarce a leg to stand upon. Other female whims followed, but none as pregnant, so invitatory of shrewd conceits, and more than single meanings;" and when pink stockings ceased to be worn, even Charles Lamb's coy sprightliness lost the touch of piquancy that had given point to his wit. But the morning tale of *bon mots* had still to be sent in. They did not cease with the fashion. Lamb compares his irksome task to the slavery of Egypt; and considering that the wit often found himself driven to play with some "rugged in-

tractable subject; some topic impossible to be contorted into the risible; some feature upon which no smile could play; some flint, from which no process of ingenuity could procure a scintillation," the task of the Jews was fool's play in comparison. "Half-a-dozen jests a day (bating Sundays, too) why, it seems nothing! We make twice the number every day in our lives, as a matter of course, and claim no Sabbatical exemptions. But then," as Lamb adds, "they come into our head. But when the head has to go out to them—when the mountain must go to Mahomet!"

What, however, made this toil of easy writing all the harder in the case of Charles Lamb, was the fact that he spent nine hours a day at this time at the India House, that is, from eight till five, and that his father insisted upon his playing cribbage with him after dinner in the evening, and that, consequently, the only time that Lamb could thus spare for the concoction of jokes, his supplementary livelihood, that supplied him in every want beyond mere bread and cheese—was exactly that part of the day, which (as we have heard of No Man's Land) may be fitly denominated No Man's Time; that is, no time in which a man ought to be up and awake in; the odd hour and a half in which a man, whose occasions call him up so preposterously, has to wait for his breakfast. "O those headaches at the dawn of day, when at five, or half-past five in summer, and not much

later in the dark seasons, we were compelled to rise, curtailed of half our fair sleep, fasting, with only a dim vista of refreshing bohea in the distance—to be necessitated to rouse ourselves at the detestable rap of an old hag of a domestic, who seemed to take a diabolical pleasure in her announcement that it was 'time to rise;' and whose chappy knuckles we have often yearned to amputate, and string them up at our chamber door, to be a terror to all such unseasonable rest-breakers in future."

But poor Lamb's engagement on the *Morning Post* did not last long, not more, probably, than a year or eighteen months; for, turning to his correspondence, I find him writing to his friend Manning in February, 1803, that the best and worst that has happened to him, is that he has given up two guineas a week at the *Post*, and regained his health and spirits, which were upon the wane. "I grew sick, and Stuart unsatisfied." He transferred his services to the office of the *Albion* newspaper, late Rackstrow's Museum, in Fleet Street. "And what a transition," he says, musing over the change in what he called his matter-of-lie style—"from a handsome apartment, from rosewood desks, and silver inkstands, to an office—no office, but a *den* rather, but just redeemed from the occupation of dead monsters, of which it seemed redolent,—from the centre of loyalty and fashion, to a focus of vulgarity and sedition! Here in murky closet, inadequate from its square

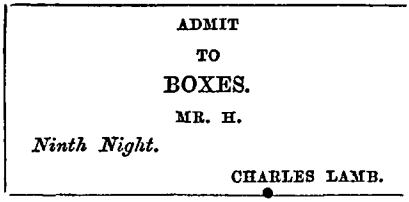
contents to the receipt of the two bodies of Editor and humble paragraph-maker, together at one time, sat in the discharge of his new editorial functions (the 'Bigod' of *Elia*,) the redoubted John Fenwick." Charles Lamb's occupation here was to write treason, to insinuate, rather than recommend, possible abdications; and in these contributions of his to the *Albion*, "blocks, axes, Whitehall tribunals, were covered with flowers of so cunning a periphrasis—as Mr. Bayes says—never naming the *thing* directly—that the keen eye of an Attorney-General was insufficient to detect the lurking snake among them." Two or three of his paragraphs were marked at the Home Office, but a lucky squib against Sir James Mackintosh broke up the establishment, by annoying Lord Stanhope, the last of their patrons, and left Lamb and his friend Fenwick, with hardly a guinea between them, "to the safe but somewhat mortifying neglect of the Crown lawyers."

This ended Lamb's newspaper career.

The year 1804 is a blank in Lamb's literary history. None of his letters have been preserved under that date; and writing to Wordsworth in November, 1805, he says he has done nothing since the beginning of last year, "when he lost his newspaper job." "I must do something," however, he adds, "or we shall get very poor. Sometimes I think of a farce, but hitherto all schemes have gone off; an idle bray or two of an evening, vapouring out of a pipe, and

going off in the morning; but now I have bid farewell to my 'sweet enemy,' tobacco, I shall perhaps set nobly to work. Hang work! I wish that all the year were holiday; I am sure that indolence—indefeasible indolence—is the true state of man, and business the invention of the old Teazer, whose interference doomed Adam to an apron and set him a-hoeing. Pen and ink, and clerks and desks, were the refinements of this old torturer some thousand years after, under pretence of 'commerce allying distant shores, promoting and diffusing knowledge, good,' &c." I need hardly add, that he postponed his farewell to tobacco for some years afterwards, on the plea that it was a very difficult task to cure anything of smoking. But the farce which he was vapouring over with his pipe, soon after took form and shape; for in a postscript to a letter addressed to Hazlitt in February, 1806, we find him intimating that he had taken a room at three shillings a week, to be in between five and eight at night, to avoid his *nocturnal* alias *knock-eternal* visitors. "The first fruits of my retirement has been a farce, which goes to the manager to-morrow." This was "Mr. H." The MS. was sent to the manager of Drury Lane Theatre, and accepted in a complimentary note almost at once. This was Lamb's first dramatic success; and the prospect of seeing his play brought upon the stage, naturally put him in high spirits. "I shall get 200*l.* from the theatre if 'Mr. H.' has

a good run, and I hope 100*l.* for the copyright. Nothing if it fails; and there never was a more ticklish thing. The whole depends on the manner in which the name is brought out, which I value myself on, as a *chef-d'œuvre.*" In anticipation of its success, he amused himself by drawing forms of orders for the admission of his friends to the pit and boxes. Here is one of his devices :—



"I think this will be as good a pattern for orders as I can think of," he says, writing to the poet of Rydal Mount. "A little thin flowery border, round, neat, not gaudy, and the Drury Lane Apollo with the harp at the top. Or shall I have no Apollo?—simply nothing? Or perhaps the comic muse? The same form, only I think without the Apollo, will serve for the pit and galleries. I think it will be best to write my name at full length; but then if I give away a great many, that will be tedious. Perhaps *Ch. Lamb* will do. BOXES, now I think on it, I'll have in capitals. The rest, in a neat Italian hand. Or better, perhaps, **Boxes** in old English characters, like 'Madoc' or Thalaba'?" "Mr. H."

was not put into rehearsal till the close of the year 1806. It was produced on the 10th of December, and in a single night all Lamb's anticipations of his 200*l.* or 300*l.*, his franking privileges, and the compliments of the press, were dissipated into thin air. The piece was damned beyond hope of redemption. Lamb sat with his sister in the front row of the pit, and joined with the house at the outset in encoring his epilogue, and afterwards, when the tide turned, took his part with equal gusto in hissing and hooting his own play and its actors off the stage. "Hang 'em! how they hissed," he says, giving his friend Manning an account of the evening's diversions. "It was not a hiss neither, but a sort of frantic yell, like a congregation of mad geese, with roaring something like bears, mows and mops like apes, sometime snakes, that hiss'd me into madness. The noise still rings in my ears. Were you ever in the pillory? Being damned is something like that."

Except that hiss, Charles Lamb soon forgot all about "Mr. H." and its failure, and turned with fresh vigour to "The Adventures of Ulysses" then on the stocks, and to the preparation of his "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the Time of Shakespeare," for Longman. And these works were hardly out of hand, when we find him entering into an agreement with Tom Sheridan over a bottle of claret, to write some scenes in what Miss Lamb calls "a speaking pantomine" for Drury Lane Thea-

tre. Whether this speaking pantomime was ever produced on the stage, I cannot say. It is written upon the model of *The Duenna;* and the MS., now lying in the British Museum, is all through in the handwriting of Lamb. It is a precise and clerkly hand, neither elegant nor fluent. Lamb himself used to call it a sort of deputy Grecian's hand, a little better and more of a worldly hand than a Grecian's, but still remote from the mercantile; Barry Cornwall says Lamb's hands were wanting in pliancy, and therefore never good, neither text nor running hand. The MS. of this pantomime is apparently a fair copy. It is as neat and legible as his correspondence.

The establishment of the *Reflector* under the auspices of Leigh Hunt, in 1810, opened a fresh and congenial sphere for the pen of Charles Lamb; and in writing his Essays on Hogarth and his criticisms on Shakespeare for the publication of his old school companion, the East India Office clerk found where his strength lay. It is not a very high compliment to a man's genius, to say that he has distinguished himself as a critic; for, with one or two exceptions, I know no critic, however distinguished he may have been in his own time, whose works the world will care to preserve a single day, except perhaps as a contemporary commentary on those great works of genius which form the noblest part of our heritage. Criticism, as a rule, is poor trash, to be read as it is generally written, off-hand, and thrown aside with-

out a second thought. But with Lamb, criticism was not cavil by the rule of line and plummet. It represented what all criticism that deserves the name of criticism ought to represent, the reflections and suggestions of a man who entered into the spirit of his author with the sympathetic insight of a man of genius; and his criticism on Shakespeare is equal to anything of the sort that I know in our literature. The paper on "Lear" is alone worth half the criticism that has been witten by Jeffrey and Gifford; and it is the only piece of criticism that one can take up and read with pleasure after laying down the play itself.

In this criticism on Shakespeare and Hogarth, and in the riper Essays of *Elia*, which were published ten or twelve years afterwards, we have Charles Lamb at his best—Charles Lamb in his happiest moments, in those moments when, surrounded by his friends at his pleasant gatherings in the Temple or in Great Russell Street, he filled his second glass, lit his pipe, and ran over his recollections of Christ's Hospital and its *autos da fé*, of its little square Bedlam cells, where for the most trifling offences boys were locked up with a handful of straw and a blanket for a week or ten days together; of his half-holidays spent in listlessly prowling about the streets, shivering at the cold windows of print shops to extract a little amusement, and returning home at nightfall, faint and languid, half rejoicing and half reluctant that the hours

of his uneasy liberty had expired; of his evenings with Coleridge in the little sanded parlour of the "Salutation and Cat," where they talked of poetry and metaphysics, and dreamt of the future; of the Temple and its old Benchers,—Coventry, with his leonine face, the scarecrow of his inferiors, the brow-beater of his equals and superiors, who made a solitude for children wherever he came, Salt, with his air of pensive gentility, Peter Pierson, with that peculiar expression of his, which, if not unhappiness itself, implied an incapacity of being happy; of the South Sea House, with its cloisters and pillars, with its beadles and doorkeepers, its few straggling clerks, and its Board of Directors seated in form on solemn days, to proclaim a dead dividend, at long worm-eaten tables;—Charles Lamb, in those moments when, as Hazlitt pictures him for us, he stammered out those fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things, in half-a-dozen sentences, which his friends loved to treasure up in their recollection, and probed a question with a play upon words;—Charles Lamb discussing the traits of men famous in history that one would wish to see again,—Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus; or closing a long tirade against vice and crime from one of his visitors, by asking, in his solemnest tone, "Whether he meant to say that a thief was not a good man?" answering a bore who was boasting that he was a matter-of-fact man, "Now, I value myself on being a matter-of-lie man;" ask-

ing one of his guests, who annoyed Coleridge and Edward Irving by his flippant remarks on Christianity, whether he had come in a hat or a turban; and tranquilising Leigh Hunt about some particularly emphatic religious expressions of Coleridge, "Ne-ne-ver mind what Coleridge says, he's full of fun;" and Charles Lamb, with one of his tattered folios tilted up before him, Donne or Sir Philip Sidney, with his pipe and his glass of gin and water by his side, turning over their most crabbed passages on his palate, "as epicures taste olives," and pronouncing them delicious; or strolling out in the lanes and fields of Enfield and chatting over Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, or the cartoons at Hampton Court. In these hours of social ease, Charles Lamb was one of the most delightful of companions, the most suggestive and often the wittiest of talkers. And what Lamb was in these hours of ease; he is in the Essays of *Elia*. They are the mirror of his conversation. "In reading over these old essays," says Barry Cornwall, "I seem to import into them the very feeling with which he wrote them; his looks and movements are transfigured, and communicated to me by the poor art of the printer. His voice, so sincere and earnest, rings in my ear again." Talfourd, too, says there is hardly a note of Lamb's that has not some tinge of the quaint sweetness, some hint of that peculiar union of kindness and whim, which distinguishes him from all other poets and humourists,

and this is peculiarly true of his Essays. They are prose sonnets, and they bring out Lamb's genius, all the qualities of his mind and heart, in their most vivid light.

Charles Lamb was one of those men who are marked out by nature for essayists. He belonged to that order of imperfect intellects which he has described in his essay on "Imperfect Sympathies," to an order of intellects which is suggestive rather than comprehensive. "The owners of these sort of faculties," he says, "have no pretence to much clearness or precision in their ideas, or in their manner of expressing them. Their intellectual wardrobe (to confess fairly) has few whole pieces in it. They are content with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth. She presents no full front to them—a feature or side-face at the most. Hints and glimpses, germs and crude essays of a system, is the utmost they pretend to. They beat up a little game, peradventure, and leave it to knottier heads, more robust constitutions, to run it down. The light that lights them is not steady and polar, but mutable and shifting: waxing, and again waning. Their conversation is accordingly. They will throw out a random word in or out of season, and be content to let it pass for what it is worth. They cannot speak always as if they were upon their oath—but must be understood, speaking or writing, with some abatement. They seldom wait to mature a proposition, but e'en bring it to market

in the green ear. They delight to impart their defective discoveries as they arise without waiting for their full development. They are no systematizers, and would but err more by attempting it." That sketch was drawn from the depth of Lamb's own consciousness. It marks the man with discrimination and delicacy, and forms the intellectual diagnosis of *Elia*.

Of constructive power Charles Lamb did not possess a spark. "I have no art for playmaking," he says, when pondering over one of his dramas, "I can do the dialogue, and that's all." He had no genius for plots and plans; and the germs of most of his writings, the germ thoughts even of some of his "Essays of *Elia*," may be traced in his "midnight companions." The ballad, for instance, of

> "An old woman clothed in grey,
> Whose daughter was charming and young,
> And she was deluded away
> By Roger's false flattering tongue,"

put him upon scribbling "Rosamund Gray," and it bears traces throughout of the recent perusal of "The Man of Feeling" and "Julia de Roubigné." "The Wife's Trial" is founded on Crabbe's tale of "The Confidant." "John Woodvil" smacks strongly of the Elizabethan dramatists. The papers on "Popular Fallacies" were suggested by Sir Thomas Browne's "Vulgar Errors." "Mr. H." was an adaptation of the story of the "Strasburg Dames" and "The

Man with a Great Nose." His poetry was thin and vapid; and most of his attempts at creation were failures. When he is drawing from memory he touches off his characters with the picturesque power of Scott. How Bigod, and Comberbatch, and Dyer, and Mrs. Battle, and his sister Bridget, stand out on his page! But when, instead of etching the portraits of his friends, Lamb tried to create, he failed. All his fictitious characters are shadows. No one ever thinks of quoting them.

"My brain is always desultory," he says, writing to Wordsworth, "and snatches off hints from things; but can seldom follow a work methodically;" and composition, in which methodising is required, he tells Coleridge is beyond his faculties. And this was apparently the fact.

Yet with all these flaws in his intellect, Charles Lamb possessed, and possessed in a high degree, most of the qualities which distinguished Addison and Montaigne, Cowley and Goldsmith. He had wit. He had humour. He had imagination. He had a good heart. Add to this that he possessed rare powers of observation, a quick eye for the picturesque, sympathies that covered the whole field of thought and feeling; that he had browsed upon our old English authors, essayists, poets, and dramatists—Sir Philip Sidney, Cowley, Donne, and Isaac Walton, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher —till he had made their spirit his own, and had

coloured with their thoughts every fibre of his own intellect; that he looked at everything from his own point of view, was free from everything like artifice and cant, and that pen in hand he jotted down his thoughts in the terse, chatty, and suggestive style in which he scribbled a note to Manning, or Coleridge, or Barnard Barton, at the India House, with clerks chatting around him of the price of indigo or the rate of exchange in Calcutta, or as he talked at his own fireside; and we have *Elia*—the *Elia* of our library shelves, and the Charles Lamb of the Temple.

I have been beating about for a phrase to describe the charm of Lamb's style. To say that it is pleasant, genial, chatty, that it sparkles with epigram, is intensely personal, rich in paradox and fancy, is to say nothing. It is all this; and yet when you have said this, you feel that, after all, you have not hit the exact mark between wind and water. There is a soul in Lamb's writing which you feel, and yet cannot describe by any single expression. Its antique simplicity, its mingled gravity and humour, its fantastic turns of thought and expression, the sweet and benevolent spirit that breathes through every sentence, even the occasional perversity of the train of thought, give the "Essays of *Elia*" a charm which, like the charm of his conversation, every one feels, and no one can hit off in a characteristic phrase. How he set himself in opposition to every principle of political economy and social morality in his chapter on "Beggars!"

And yet what a halo of sentiment and fancy he throws around the Blind Tobits of the Strand and Fleet-street. You disagree with his theory; you know that theory to be based on a false and mischievous conception, and yet how it fits in with all Lamb's thoughts and sentiments! There *is* that way of looking at Beggars, and you feel at once that that is Lamb's way. He takes a side view of Beggars, and refuses to trouble himself with "withering theories of population."

But you must know Lamb, and know all these whims and fancies of his, to take up his volumes and enter into their spirit heart and soul. "Yes, a clever fellow—a clever fellow, certainly," said Moore, after spending an hour or two with him at Barnes's but—" And that *but* was what most people were apt to add who knew Lamb only from what they saw and heard of him across the table, stuttering out puns about the Duke of Cu-cumberland, taking up a candle to examine the bumps of a Supervisor of Excise who had ventured to suggest after supper that "Mr. Milton must have been a great man;" and shaking off a prosy dowager who bored him with her account of the virtues of a charming man—"I know him, bless him!"—with an off-hand, "Well, I don't, but damn him at a hazard." Moore's observation represents the impression, I believe, of many people still who take up Lamb's writings for the first time. In his own day these Essays of *Elia* were none of them par-

ticularly popular; and the taste for them here now is for the most part a reaction from America. Charles Lamb's books sold there by thousands long before his English publishers could get through a single edition; and when Willis, the American tourist, called upon Lamb at his chambers in the Temple, and produced a volume of *Elia* which he had bought for 7*s*. 6*d*. in New York, Lamb took out his purse, counted 7*s*. 6*d*. on the table, and insisted upon his visitor taking the price of his book. The highest sum that Charles Lamb received for any of his writings was, I believe, for the *Wife's Secret*. This was originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and Messrs. Blackwood sent him a cheque for £20 for it. This was a windfall for Lamb; for all that he received from Messrs. Taylor and Hessey for his two years' contributions to their magazine, was about £170. But perhaps this was all these contributions were worth to them; for when published in the *London* the Essays of *Elia* met with very little notice. "Hang the age: I'll write for antiquity;" Lamb used to say in his pettish way. "Authorship is cold work, without something to puff one into fashion;" and it was very cold work to Charles Lamb for years. But the Essays of *Elia* are now to be found in every form, from a luxurious edition at a guinea to a people's edition at a shilling, and in every form they circulate by thousands, and yield a revenue to their publishers equal to that from the best novels of the season.

Many of Lamb's writings bear marks of the file; and it is notorious that he generally wrote with great labour. His Essays on "Books" and on "Poor Relations" are wrought like a piece of tapestry; and yet when we compare even essays like these with the best of his letters—those to Manning, for instance, which are as terse and as rich in thought, and whim, and fancy, as anything that he wrote for the press, and which we know were written in the main at his desk in Leadenhall-street on invoices and bills of lading—it is not easy to say off-hand how much of this terseness and compression is the result of labour and how much the consequence of habit. Run through the Essay on the "Superanuated Man," and then turn to his letters to Manning and Barton upon his sensations when walking home "for ever." The letters are superior, infinitely superior, to my thinking, to the essay, and his fictitious "Life of Liston" falls far below his letters to Manning. But of his habits of composition we know next to nothing; for he kept no diary, he left none of his original drafts, and he is curiously reticent in his correspondence with his friends about all his compositions, with the exception of his Sonnets, and these generally speak for themselves. But from the hints which he drops here and there in his Essays and in his correspondence it is plain that he wrote very slowly, revised and corrected endlessly, and had a horror of the work—"All things read raw to me in MS., I cannot endure my

own writings in that state"—and generally preferred to write by candle-light. Extolling the invention of "long sixes," in his whimsical essay on the fallacy "that we should lie down with the lamb," *Elia* says he loves to read, talk, sit silent, eat, drink, sleep, by candle-light. "By the midnight taper the writer digests his meditations; by the same light we must approach to their perusal, if we would catch the flame, the odour. It is a mockery all that is reported of the influential Phœbus; no true poem ever owed its birth to the sun's light. They are abstracted works—

> "Things that were born when none but the still night
> And his dumb candle saw his pinching throes.'

Marry! daylight—daylight might furnish the images, the crude material; but for the fine shapings, the true turning and filing (as mine author hath it,) they must be content to hold their inspiration of the candle. The mild internal light that reveals them, like fires on the domestic hearth, goes out in the sunshine. Night and silence call out the starry fancies. Milton's 'Morning Hymn in Paradise,' we would hold a good wager, was penned at midnight; and Taylor's rich description of a sunrise smells decidedly of the taper. Even ourself (Lamb adds,) in these our humbler lucubrations, tune our best-measured cadences (Prose has her cadences) not unfrequently to the charm of the drowsier watchman

'blessing the doors,' or the wild sweep of winds at midnight." That he wrote slowly, we have his own direct acknowledgment in more than one instance. Writing to Southey, for instance, when "John Woodvil" was on hand, Lamb hints his doubt whether it will ever be finished; "for," he says, "I am as slow as a Flemish painter when I compose anything." When writing blank verse, again, he complains that he is dismally slow and sterile of ideas; and we have more than one hint as to the re-casting of his essays. "I write with great difficulty," he says, when at work upon his review of "The Excursion" for the *Quarterly*. "I can scarce command my resolution to sit at writing an hour together." And his sister, in a letter recently brought to light by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, gives us an interesting glimpse of Charles Lamb when at work, I believe, upon this notable review. "Last winter," she says, writing in Nov. 1814, "my brother being unable to pursue a work he had begun, owing to the kind interruptions of friends who were more at leisure than himself, I persuaded him that he might write at his ease in one of these rooms (a suite of tenantless garrets, which they had discovered by breaking through the panel of their own apartments) as he could not then hear the door knock, or hear himself denied to be at home, which was sure to make him call out and convict the poor maid in a fib. Here, I said, he might be almost really not at home.

So I put in an old grate, and made him a fire in the largest of these garrets, and carried in one table and one chair, and bid him write away, and consider himself as much alone as if he were in some lodging in the midst of Salisbury Plain, or any other wide, unfrequented place, where he could expect few visitors to break in upon his solitude. I left him quite delighted with his new acquisition, but in a few hours he came down again with a sadly dismal face. He could do nothing, he said, with those bare white-washed walls before his eyes. He could not write in that dull unfurnished prison. The next day, before he came home from his office, I had gathered up various bits of old carpeting to cover the floor; and to a little break the blank look of the bare walls, I hung up a few old prints that used to ornament the kitchen; and after dinner, with great boast of what an improvement I had made, I took Charles once more into his new study. A week of busy labours followed, in which I think you would not have disliked to have been our assistant. My brother and I almost covered the walls with prints, for which purpose he cut out every print from every book in his old library;" and there Lamb spent many hours at his desk in the evening. But what Lamb did at his desk was generally nothing more than the work of transcription. He never sat down to his desk to think. This was the work of his apparently purposeless strolls in the Strand, or Fleet Street, or the

Hertfordshire meadows; for walking was the only pleasure Lamb allowed himself; and except now and then, when Coleridge or Tom Hood happened to be on a visit to him, his own thoughts were his only companions. "When I am not walking," he says, "I am reading. I cannot sit and think. Books think for me." And, with rare exceptions, his books were his only companions in his Temple Chambers, and to these he dedicated no inconsiderable portion of his time. "To dream away his life in other people's speculations" was one of his greatest luxuries. He loved "to lose himself in other men's minds." Books were, to him, for years his only friends: and even when, after his retirement from the India House, he had gathered half the literati of London around his supper table, his tattered folios still continued to be his best and most cherished friends. He loved his ragged veterans beyond everything except his sister, loved them as Wordsworth loved his grottoes and gravel walks and flower beds at Rydal Mount, and anticipated the pang of parting with them as keenly as the poet did parting with all the dearest associations of his life. Every blot, every dog's-eared page, every grease spot was as well known to him as the signs of Fleet Street and Cheapside, and Charles Lamb thought his books all the dearer for these marks of their ownership. "And you, my midnight darlings," he exclaims, in a passage which will at once suggest itself to everyone

who knows *Elia;* "And you, my midnight darlings, my folios! must I part with the intense delight of having you (huge armfuls) in my embrace?" Books and prints were the only decorations that he allowed in his rooms—not a flower or an image, nothing but his prints in their black frames, and his long plain bookcase, and with these he thought his rooms luxuriously furnished. These books were the only extravagances he permitted himself to indulge in. They were all his own choice, were all old and tattered, picked up principally as bargains at book-stalls,—and were all kept in his bookcase in the most admired disorder. Yet Lamb knew every one of them, knew all their nooks and corners, and could lay his hand upon any volume that he wanted in a moment. "You never saw a bookcase in more true harmony with the contents," Lamb says in one of his letters, "than what I have nailed up in my rooms, though now it has more aptitude for growing old than you shall often see; as one sometimes gets a friend in the middle of life who becomes an old friend in a short time." The "contents" were all of the most antique description; for he cared for none of the moderns, and with two or three exceptions never read any of the works of his contemporaries, unless they happened to be sent to him as presentation copies, and most of these were skimmed through hastily over his pipe after supper. The Scotch novels were his aversion. The Laras and

Rokebys that everyone else was talking about, he threw aside with contempt. "Enquire for them seven years hence," he said, "and where will they be then?" The Apostrophe to Parnassus was the only passage in Byron that he read a second time. Burns and Cowper were the only poets whose works were allowed to find a nook in his bookcase. These were both favourites. Burns was "the god of his idolatry," and Cowper's "divine chit-chat" hit his taste exactly. But these were the only exceptions. All his bookish tastes were with the past, with those tall folios of his, with the old dramatists and essayists; and he used to say that he preferred "the huge density of the old schoolmen to the flippancy of modern criticism." Isaac Walton's *Angler* he loved like an old friend. "It breathes the very spirit of innocence, purity, and simplicity of heart," he says; "there are many choice old phrases treasured up in it; it would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read it; it would Christianize every discordant, angry passion." Cowley, too, was "very dear to him." His prose essays, as well as no inconsiderable part of his verse, he thought delicious. He preferred "the graceful rambling of his essays even to the courtly elegance and ease of Addison, abstracting from these the latter's exquisite humour." He revelled in the ancients: they were his peculiar delight; and he would repeat Pope and Dryden's verses with his eyes trembling with tears. Wycherley, Congreve, and

Farquhar he pored over hour after hour. He preferred Fielding and Smollett even to Sir Walter Scott, and, as far as I can recollect on the spur of the moment, the only exception that he made in favour of modern works as against those of what he called the ancients, was in the case of Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This he was delighted with.

Yet with all his bookish tastes, no man was less of a bookworm than Charles Lamb. He could not live without his books; but no man had healthier or keener human instincts than the author of the Essays of *Elia*. "I must have books, pictures, theatres, chit-chat, scandal, jokes, ambiguities, and a thousand whim-whams." How sentences like these show us the working of the man's heart and brain! "I am in love with this green earth, the face of town and country, the unspeakable rural solitude, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I have arrived, I and my friends; to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer." His love of idleness was that of an Epicurean. To have nothing to do was to him the highest felicity. "A man can never have too much time to himself nor too little to do." This was the continual principle of his philosophy. "Had I a son," he said, "I would christen him *Nothing*-to-do." He was the lotus-eater of English literature; and during the happiest years of his life Charles Lamb acted up to this philosophy as

closely as a man could. He made all his days afternoons; and it is the reflection of this spirit of his life, so to speak, in his writings that gives the *Essays of Elia* that perennial charm which they share with Horace and Montaigne, and with Horace and Montaigne almost alone.

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

WHAT was said of the romantic and chivalrous Count of Lauzun may, with almost as much truth, be said of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. His life was stranger than the dreams of other people. He lived all his life in an atmosphere of romance; and this life is made up of a series of scenes as picturesque and dramatic in themselves as anything to be found out of the Arabian Nights.

The son of an Irish actor, endowed with the most brilliant and varied gifts of nature, high spirit, a noble presence, imagination, wit, and eloquence, all those qualities that win the admiration of men and the affection of women, yet without a shilling in the world to call his own, without either of those recommendations which form the passport to the highest circles of English society—high birth and university honours—the author of the *School for Scandal* rose by the mere force of his genius, and rose almost at a bound, to the highest position in the ranks of political and social life, at a period when political and social life in England was tainted by the narrowest and most exclusive spirit that has ever distinguished the aristocracy of this country. He held that position, and held it with *éclat*, all through a long life, the rival of wits like Colman and Horne Tooke;

of orators and statesmen like Pitt, and Fox, and Burke; and of men of genius like Byron and Scott. He died in the arms of a sheriff's officer, and was buried, with honours all but regal, with princes of the blood for his pall-bearers, in the sepulchre of our greatest kings and statesmen. It was a brilliant but a sad career, full of startling contrasts, marked by many humiliations and many victories, by great failures and great successes; and yet now, when one asks what remains of all this genius and of all this success, it is not easy to frame an answer. A speech or two, which no one now thinks of reading, except to trace, in its most vivid colours, what he thinks the false taste of the age in eloquence and wit; the fleeting recollection of a few epigrams and *bon mots;* and two or three sparkling contributions to the literature of the drama:—these are all that remain to mark the genius of the man who for thirty years was

"The pride of the palace, the bower, and the hall."

The recklessness with which Sheridan compromised with fame and fortune, abandoning the honorable and distinguished position in history which was his by right of genius, for the faint and flickering reputation of a drawing-room wit, is, as far as I know, without a parallel. What Byron said of him in his epigram is quite true. "He has written the best comedy, the best opera, the best farce, and the best address, and, to crown all, delivered the very best

oration ever conceived or heard in this country." And yet, with all this, no one who crossed his path, no one who knew him in the House of Commons, in the green-room of Drury Lane Theatre, at the dinner-table, or at Brookes's, thought his achievements equal to his genius. To all appearance, a mere idle man about town, thinking of nothing but the caprice and pleasure of the hour, a mere spendthrift of all his gifts, no one ever spoke of Sheridan but as

> "The orator, dramatist, minstrel, who ran
> Through each mode of the lyre, and was master of all,
> Whose mind was an essence, compounded with wit,
> From the finest and best of all other men's powers;"

and I know no reason for supposing that the general impression of Sheridan and of his powers is not the correct impression; for he was put to every test that a man of genius could be put to, from the composition of *vers de société* to the preparation of state papers; from the concoction of *bon mots* to the arraignment of a great prisoner of state in Westminster Hall, as one of the spokesmen of the House of Commons; and he was equal to every test.

This impression of Sheridan's contemporaries must, however, be taken with one or two reservations. What they set down to inspiration, and to the spontaneous working of a keen and active intellect—brilliant bits of dialogues in his plays, bold and happy flights of eloquence, telling retorts and vivid epigrams—we know to have been the result in nearly

every case of long hours of preparation and labour at his desk. There was more artifice about Sheridan as a writer and an orator than about any man of equal genius. He loved to keep up an air of mystery about his genius. You may trace this trait in him even as a boy at Harrow. His ambition then was to be distinguished as the idlest boy in the school, and the most active in the play-ground. His industry was just enough to protect him from disgrace, and that was all. Yet, when he left Harrow at eighteen, he knew enough of the classics to talk "copiously and powerfully" about Cicero and Demosthenes with a scholar like Dr. Parr, was at home in Virgil and Horace, and could read the *Iliad*, if not with the critical discernment of a scholar, at least with "all the strong sympathies of a poet reading a poet."

What he was at Harrow, he was in Westminster Hall. "You know I'm an ignoramus," he used to say to his friends when pressed to take up any question of party interest; "but here I am, instruct me, and I'll do my best;" and there is a very piquant anecdote current in illustration of what many of his friends thought his reckless reliance on his audacity and wit. At the trial of Warren Hastings, Sheridan, as I need hardly say, took what is called the Begum charge; and when the evidence was complete upon each charge, the manager was called upon for his reply. It was one of the rules of the court that every

reference to a specific statement in the evidence should be verified at once by a reference to the minutes; and it was the custom, therefore, for the managers to be accompanied in their box by a friend or secretary to carry their bag of papers, and to read any document or passage in the evidence that might be called for by the Lords. Sheridan asked Mr. Michael Angelo Taylor to act this part for him; and on the morning of the speech, Mr. Taylor asked Sheridan for the bag. "Bag! I have no bag," was Sheridan's reply; "neither bag nor papers. We must manage as well as we can without them; and when the papers are called for, you must put the best countenance you can upon it. As for myself," added Sheridan, "I shall abuse Ned Law, ridicule Plumer's long orations, make the court laugh, please the women, and, with your aid, get triumphantly through the task." The court listened to Sheridan's opening of the case with the profoundest attention; but when he came to contrast the evidence of the Commons with that adduced by Hastings, it was not long before the Chancellor interrupted him with a request that the printed minutes to which he referred should be read. Sheridan answered that his friend Mr. Taylor would read them; and Mr. Taylor affected to send for the bag, while the orator begged leave, in the meantime, to proceed. Again, however, his statements rendered a reference to the minutes necessary, and again he was interrupted by the Chancellor, while an outcry

after Mr. Sheridan's bag was raised in all directions. At first the blame was laid on the solicitor's clerk; then a messenger was dispatched to Mr. Sheridan's house. In the meantime the orator was proceeding brilliantly in his argument, and, on some further interruption and expostulation from the Chancellor, raised his voice, and said, in a dignified tone: "On the part of the Commons, and as a manager of the impeachment, I shall conduct my case as I think proper. I mean to be correct, and your lordships, having the printed minutes before you, will afterwards see whether I am right or wrong." During the bustle produced by the inquiries after the bag, Mr. Fox, alarmed at the inconvenience which he feared the want of it might occasion to Sheridan, ran up from the manager's room, and demanded eagerly the cause of this mistake from Mr. Taylor, who, hiding his mouth with his hand, whispered, in a tone that Fox only too well understood: "The man has no bag!" Standing by itself, this looks like the *ne plus ultra* of audacity and wit. Yet we know now, upon evidence which it is impossible to doubt, that this, after all, was a mere stage trick to raise that sort of surprise at the readiness of his resources which it was the favourite triumph of his vanity to create. "I have it on the authority of Mr. William Smythe," says Tom Moore in his sketch, "that, previously to the delivery of this speech, Sheridan passed two or three days alone at Wanstead, so occupied

from morning till night in writing and reading of papers as to complain in the evenings that he 'had motes before his eyes.'"

And this was the case with all Sheridan's speeches. He could not speak—and, with one or two trifling exceptions, never made any attempt to speak—without the most elaborate preparation. Moore found the manuscripts of most of his speeches in his desk. At first, Sheridan had written out his speeches word for word, after sketching them in the rough in an old copy-book; and the showier passages, Moore tells us, were generally written two or three times over (often without any material change in their form) upon small detached pieces of paper, or on cards. To such minutiæ of effect did he attend, indeed, that Moore found, in more than one instance, a memorandum made of the precise place in which the words "Good God! Mr. Speaker" were to be introduced. It was, in fact, upon these "bits of purple," as Canning used to call them, that Sheridan concentrated all his powers in the preparation of his speeches. He left the points of his argument to shift for themselves, often apparently relying upon his own good sense, or the inspiration of the moment, to suggest the line of his observation or criticism.

This was the source of the most noticeable vice of Sheridan's speeches. You could distinguish the prepared parts from the rest by your ear in an instant. Dugald Stewart noticed it particularly in his first

speech in Westminster Hall. Taken all in all that speech was, he said, particularly fine; but the transition from the studied declamation to the laxity of his business statements was abrupt and ill-managed. And in a case of this description, this flaw in Sheridan's style must have been all the more striking from its contrast with Burke's; for it was the very reverse of Burke's plan. He worked out his line of argument, in preparing his speeches, as closely as a mathematician works out his calculations of a star's orbit, and left the work of amplification and adornment to the fancy of the moment.

In the preparation of epigrams, special phrases, and metaphors too, Sheridan was almost finical in his criticism. They were written down on cards and scraps of paper, conned over, altered, revised, and recast till they were brought into the most vivid form in which it was possible to set the thought or the sarcasm; and then they were thrown off either in a speech or in conversation with the careless and insouciant air of a man uttering an impromptu. I have not space to give more than one or two illustrations of this. Here, however, is a striking instance at hand in his famous speech upon the state of Ireland. "I cannot think patiently of such petty squabbles," says Sheridan, rising from a vein of banter about trifles into one of his flights of eloquence—"I cannot think patiently of such petty squabbles, while Bonaparte is grasping the nations;

while he is surrounding France, not with that iron frontier, for which the wish and childish ambition of Louis XIV. was so eager, but with kingdoms of his own creation; securing the gratitude of higher minds as the hostage, and the fears of others as pledges for his safety. His are no ordinary fortifications. His martello towers are thrones; sceptres tipped with crowns are the palisadoes of his intrenchments, and kings are his sentinels." Now, that sentence had been conned over and tried in form after form on scraps of paper. Here are two or three versions of it in the rough: "Contrast the different attitudes and occupations of the two governments: B. eighteen months from his capital; headquarters in the villages —neither Berlin nor Warsaw; dethroning and creating thrones. The works he raises are monarchies; sceptres his palisadoes; thrones his martello towers." "Commissioning kings, erecting thrones, martello towers; Cambacérès count noses; Austrians, fine dressed, like Pompey's troops." "B. fences with sceptres; his martello towers are thrones: he alone is France."

His impromptu speeches were, like his letters, generally poor and pointless; and when the conversation at dinner happened to take a turn for which he was not prepared either by thought or reading, Sir Walter Scott says Sheridan would sit sullen and silent, swilling glass after glass, rather a hindrance than a help; and Moore, colouring this statement a

little, says Sheridan would "wait patiently through a whole evening for the exact moment when the shaft, which he had ready feathered, might be let fly with effect. There was no effort, either obvious or disguised, to lead to the subject—no 'question detached' (as he himself expresses it) 'to draw you into the ambuscade of his ready-made joke;' and, when the lucky moment *did* arrive, the natural and accidental manner in which he would let this treasured sentence fall from his lips, considerably added to the astonishment and the charm. So bright a thing, produced so easily, seemed like the delivery of Wieland's Amanda in a dream; and his own apparent unconsciousness of the value of what he said might have deceived dull people into the idea that there was really nothing in it." His *forte* in conversation was banter; and he shone best when attacking some person in the company, or some opinion which he had heard expressed. Byron thought him superb in this. "I have seen him cut up Whitbread," he says in his diary, "quiz Madame de Staël, annihilate Colman, and do little else by some others (whose names as friends I set not down) of good fame and ability."

Of course, like all men of wit, Sheridan could throw out retorts and sarcasms on the spur of the moment; and when driven to bay, he was generally equal to the occasion. His reply to Pitt when taunted in the House of Commons with his genius for the stage, was very apt. "Flattered and encouraged by

the right honourable gentleman's panegyric on my talents, if ever I again engage in the compositions he alludes to, I may be tempted to an act of presumption—to attempt an improvement on one of Ben Jonson's best characters, the character of the Angry Boy in the *Alchemist.*" There was a touch of the master, too, in his reply to the lady, who, after pestering him at a country-house half the morning to walk out with her, and being put off with excuses on account of the weather, discovered him at last escaping by a side-door. "Well, I see it has cleared up, Mr. Sheridan," said the lady, with all a lady's archness under the circumstances. "Why, yes," said Sheridan, making good his escape, "it has cleared up enough for *one*, but not for *two*." His excuse to the man who remonstrated with him for drinking when his theatre was in flames: "Well, sir, may not a man drink a glass of wine by his own fireside?" is characteristic but second-hand. It is at least as old as Hierocles. His reply, however, to the watchman who found him half seas over in Covent Garden, and asked him for his name—"Wilberforce"—is, I believe, as authentic as it is humorous. And so, too, was his remark upon a publication in which one of his friends told him gratitude was proved to be a vice, law an imposition, and marriage an improper restraint—"I always thought reading a vice, and now I am convinced of it." But it was not in sallies of this kind that Sheridan threw out his best things.

His wit was not like that of Theodore Hook and Douglas Jerrold, of Horne Tooke and Sydney Smith; it was rather like that of Rabelais and Swift. Sheridan, like Swift, was of a saturnine humour; and his wittiest sayings—those by which he will be best remembered—were those which he had turned off when he was lying in bed in the morning, when idling at his dressing-table, or at his desk preparing for the after-dinner chat of the evening. And this was his habit. At Holland House he used to take a bottle of wine and a book up to bed with him every night—the first only, of course, intended for use. In the morning he breakfasted in bed, and had a little rum or brandy with his tea or coffee. He hardly ever made his appearance till between one and two, and then pretending important business set off for town: but he always stopped at the Adam and Eve public house on his way for a dram. All these drams, of course, were chalked up, and Lord Holland left to pay the scot. He was not a ready man, was generally slow in argument, and did not all at once, as Lord Holland said, see your drift. He made himself what he was as a Parliamentary speaker, like Fox, at the expense of the House; for, like Fox, Erskine, and Disraeli, his first appearance was anything but a success. He was hesitating and common-place, possessing apparently neither originality, fluency, nor the taking personal address which, looking at his portrait at this period, one might have supposed to be one of his dis-

tinguishing traits. Strolling into the Gallery after his speech, Sheridan came across Woodfall, and asked him what he thought of the *début*. "I think this is not your line," answered the candid critic, with all the candour that a critic generally knows how to put into his tone upon an occasion of this description. "No, Sheridan. You had better stick to those pursuits you are so much more fitted for." This was the advice of Horace Twiss to Cobden. But Sheridan, like Cobden, had set his heart upon distinguishing himself in Parliament; and after leaning his head upon his hand for a few seconds upon the Gallery rail, he muttered to himself, "It is *in* me, and (with an expletive) it shall come out." It took years of practice to bring out what was in; and it was not till 1786 that his speech on the proposed plan of fortification placed him at the head of the second class of Parliamentary orators, and marked him out as one of the Managers of the Impeachment of Warren Hastings. These two or three years were the most brilliant of his life. Pitt then thought him a greater man than either Fox or Burke; and Burke thought him a greater orator than all three. "That is the true style," said Burke, slapping his thigh after listening to the second speech of his countryman, "something neither prose nor poetry, but better than either." Fox thought it balderdash, and that Burke in imitating it spoilt his own style. Reading it now, and testing it by the severe canons of taste which we

are in the habit of applying to speaking and writing, it must be acknowledged that Fox's criticism is nearer the mark than Burke's. But we have not been under the wand of the enchanter, and the report of the speech which we possess was not Sheridan's own. Dugald Stewart thought some parts of the speech particularly fine, and Dugald Stewart was one of the most fastidious critics of the day; and Sir James Mackintosh, after hearing many of Sheridan's speeches in the House and out of it, acknowledged that with all their faults the most deliberate criticism must allow them to be distinguished by strong sense and brilliant wit, by a vigour of argument not too ingenious for business nor too sensible for conviction, by a great command of pure English words, and by a vivid power of imagination in those passages which aim at grandeur and pathos, although, as he adds, they were perhaps a trifle too artificial and ostentatious to produce the highest effect, or to be approved by a severe taste.

Of the art of concealing art, however, Sheridan was a master; and till Tom Moore revealed his secret by printing and publishing every scrap of manuscript in Sheridan's portfolio that he could put together and decipher, every one, I believe, thought Sheridan's powers of imagination, eloquence, and wit those of an improvisatore. Even with the help of these memoranda, it is not always easy to distinguish the fruit of inspiration from the result of

labour; for Sheridan had a happy knack of adapting his recollections to the necessities of the moment, and of passing off as an impromptu a stroke of wit that he had probably been turning over in his manuscripts years before for a different purpose, and then abandoned as hopeless. The neatly turned and pithy sentence in which he once disposed of a couple of hours' eloquence from the ministerial benches—"The right honourable gentleman is indebted to his memory for his jests, and to his imagination for his facts"—was a happy adaptation, in a light and quotable form, of a sentence which he had jotted down and elaborated for one of his comedies, and then abandoned. Here is the sentence as it stands in his manuscript: "He certainly has a great deal of fancy, and a very good memory; but, with a perverse ingenuity, he employs those qualities as no other person does, for he employs his fancy in his narratives, and keeps his recollection for his wit: when he makes his jokes, you applaud the accuracy of his memory; and 'tis only when he states his facts, that you admire the flights of his imagination." This was turned off, and altered, and condensed time after time, and then thrown aside, like so many others of the same kind, as too elaborate for light and sparkling dialogue; and then brought forth years after in the form in which it now lives in every one's recollection.

Here, too, we have the key to Sheridan's system of working out the dialogue of his plays. Those who know how to read between the lines, may trace the marks of labour in every line of Sheridan's, in every turn of his phrases, and even in his selection of epithets. Take, for instance, the *School for Scandal.* It is at once the most original and the most perfect of all his works. Plot there is none, or next to none. The characters are all sketched with a light hand. There is no attempt at anything strikingly original in the representation of any of them. Charles and Joseph Surface are but shadows of Tom Jones and Blifil; and, with the exception of Sir Peter Teazle, the rest of the *dramatis personæ* are all of the most ordinary description. All the interest of the piece turns upon its dialogue, and upon the two or three incidents that mark its development. Yet so adroitly are these incidents contrived, so light, and sparkling, and characteristic is the dialogue, that the *School for Scandal* stands out in the literature of the drama side by side with the most brilliant and finished creations of the genius of Molière and Shakspeare. In Shakspeare and Molière you never miss the shadow of the hand writing on the wall; you may trace the author through all his dialogue. You may know Sheridan, too, everywhere by his wit. But I venture to say that no one ever yet thought of tracing the hand of a slow and saturnine man of

letters in the idiomatic turns of expression, the light and sparkling fancies, and the piquant badinage that constitute the charm of the *School for Scandal.* Yet we know, as a matter of fact, that no man ever wrote poetry or fiction more slowly or laboriously than Sheridan; and of all Sheridan's plays, none was written with more thought and labour, with more pains, than the *School for Scandal.* The *Rivals* was thrown off in six weeks or a couple of months, at a country-house in the autumn. The *Duenna,* with the help of a hint or two from Wycherley, was written probably in about the same time; and the *Critic* bears too many marks of the Duke of Buckingham's *Rehearsal* for us to suppose that it was the result of very much cogitation on the part of Sheridan. The *School for Scandal* was all his own; and every scene, every incident, and every phrase in the dialogue had been turned over in Sheridan's mind for months. Moore thinks, from his examination of the manuscripts, that the first parts of this play were written before the *Rivals,* or at least very soon after it; and though none of the manuscripts are dated, it is sufficiently obvious, from the scrappy way in which his ideas are jotted down, and bits of dialogue scrawled out here and there in his manuscript books, that the play was rarely out of his mind for two or three years. His original intention seems to have been to sketch out a couple of plays; and the

rough drafts bear many traces of Wycherley and Vanbrugh. Lady Sneerwell and Spatter, Mrs. Candour and Clerimont, the original of Charles Surface, are the principal figures in the first sketch. Sir Peter and Lady Teazle do not appear till the second draft is sketched out; and in this draft Sir Peter is simply a vulgar old man who has "left off trade," and married a skittish, hare-brained wife. His name in this draft is Solomon. Here is the opening scene:

"*Old Teazle* (*alone*).—In the year '44, I married my first wife; the wedding was at the end of the year—ay, 'twas in December; yet, before Ann. Dom. '45, I repented. A month before, we swore we preferred each other to the whole world—perhaps we spoke truth; but when we came to promise to love each other till death, there I am sure we lied. Well, Fortune owed me a good turn; in '48 she died. Ah, silly Solomon, in '52 I find thee married again! Here, too, is a catalogue of ills—Thomas, born February 12; Jane, born January 6; so they go on to the number of five. However, by death I stand credited but by one. Well, Margery, rest her soul! was a queer creature; when she was gone, I felt awkward at first, and being sensible that wishes availed nothing, I often wished for her return. For ten years more I kept my senses, and lived single. O blockhead, dolt Solomon! Within this twelvemonth, thou art

married again—married to a woman thirty years younger than thyself; a fashionable woman. Yet I took her with caution; she had been educated in the country; but now she has more extravagance than the daughter of an earl, more levity than a countess. What a defect it is in our laws, that a man who has once been branded in the forehead, should be hanged for the second offence."

When the two sketches were thrown together, and Sheridan had struck out the intrigue upon which the play now turns, 'Old Teazle' was knighted, and turned into a gentleman; the coarser traits in the original conception of Lady Teazle were toned down; Maria was endowed with corresponding grace and beauty; Spunge and Spatter were transformed into Tripe and Snake; and the whole of the dialogue was again thrown into the crucible, elaborated here, softened down there, scenes transposed, and strokes of wit taken out of one mouth and put into that of another, and prosy and pointless soliloquies broken up into bright and piquant bits of conversation. Two or three of the scenes were re-written time after time before they attained their present degree of point and polish; and Sheridan once told Rogers that he intended to make a love scene between Charles and Maria, as he ought to have done, but that none of the actors who took part in it were able to do such a scene justice. The scene in which Charles Surface as Clerimont

makes his first appearance in the draft is of the crudest construction. Its language is without a spark of Sheridan's spirit, and the incidents are neither novel nor natural. This scene was put through trial after trial. That exquisite scene, again, between Lady Teazle and Joseph Surface was brought out with great labour. It appears in three or four forms, and in each form it is hardly legible from alterations and interlineations. With the exception of the four or five closing scenes, the marks of labour that distinguish this scene, distinguish in hardly a less degree all parts of the play. Moore, in looking through Sheridan's manuscripts, found "numerous transcripts of every act, scattered promiscuously through six or seven books, with new interlineations and memorandums to each." The last five scenes alone bear signs of haste; and these, I presume, were the scenes which tradition says were written when Sheridan was locked up in the manager's room, with a bottle of Madeira, and two or three old stage-plays to crib from. Of these scenes there is but one rough draft, scribbled upon loose pieces of paper, apparently just as they came to hand; and on the last leaf of all, which exists just as we may suppose it to have been despatched by him to the copyist, there is the following curious specimen of doxology, written hastily at the bottom: "Finished at last, thank God! R. B. Sheridan.—Amen! W. Hopkins." Knowing what we

do of Sheridan's habits of composition, and of the style of his manuscripts, we can easily appreciate the pathos that underlies these sighs of relief. It was still worse in the case of *Pizarro;* for all that was written of this play when it was put on the boards, was, if we may credit the tradition of the green-room, that actually in rehearsal at the moment, and until the end of the fourth act, it is said, neither Mrs. Siddons, nor Charles Kemble, nor Barrymore had all their speeches for the fifth. Sheridan was upstairs in the prompter's room, where he was writing the last part of the play while the earlier parts were acting; and every ten minutes he brought down as much of the dialogue as he had done, piecemeal, into the green-room, abusing himself and his negligence, and making a thousand soothing apologies for having kept the performers so long in suspense. It sounds incredible; but the anecdote is too characteristic of the man to be discredited on that ground.

It is not often that we can trace the hand of an author through his work as closely as we trace that of Sheridan, especially where, as in this case, there is neither diary nor correspondence to give us a clue to the manuscripts. But Sheridan has left every scrap of paper, and every card containing the slightest hint or memorandum, all his original sketches, all the odds and ends of his *vers de société,* all his outlines of dramas that were never written; and

through these we may trace him in every mood. Here we find him scribbling out a song or a pasquinade; jotting down his thoughts first in a sort of poetical prose, and breaking out, now and then, into a rhyme or a metrical line. Planning some verses on the short duration of life, and the change that death produces, he jots down a triplet:

> "Of that same tree which gave the box,
> Now rattling in the hand of FOX,
> Perhaps his coffin shall be made;"

and then rambles into prose on what Moore calls a sort of knight errantry after thoughts and images: "The lawn thou hast chosen for thy bridal shift—thy shroud may be of the same piece. That flower thou hast bought to feed thy vanity—from the same tree thy corpse may be decked. Reynolds, shall, like his colours, fly; and Brown, when mingled with the dust, manure the grounds he once laid out. Death is life's second childhood; we return to the breast from whence we came, are weaned . . . ." These suggestions were afterwards reduced to the form of poetry; and when he had a piece like this in hand, he seems to have been puzzling his wits everywhere to find rhymes to fit to the principal names that he contemplated introducing. He was very fond of trifling with rhymes in this way; and when he did hit upon a name or an incident that struck his fancy—"Mr. Bigg," "Lady Jane," or the Loss of a Trunk—he taxed his fancy for lines to suit every rhyme in

the language corresponding with the one that formed the keynote of his piece. Here is a specimen of these squibs. The lines are on a Mr. Bigg:

"I own he's not famed for a reel or a jig;
Tom Sheridan there surpasses Tom *Bigg;*
For, lamed in one thigh, he is obliged to go zig-
Zag, like a crab—so no dancer is *Bigg.*
Those who think him a coxcomb, or call him a prig,
How little they know of the mind of my *Bigg!*
Though he ne'er can be mine, Hope will catch at a twig—
Two Deaths—and I yet may become Mrs. *Bigg.*
Oh, give me, with him, but a cottage and pig,
And content I would live on Beans, Bacon and *Bigg.*"

Like the *School for Scandal,* most of his pieces seem to have grown under his hand—to have been written, that is, without any preconceived plan. Explaining the composition of the *Rivals* in a note to his father-in-law, Mr. Linley, Sheridan says: "I had not written a line of it two months ago, except a scene or two, which I believe you have seen in an odd act of a little farce;" and the probability is, I think, that he appropriated the plot of his mother's unpublished *Trip to Bath* as the groundwork of the piece. In the *Duenna,* he took the intrigue in Wycherley's *Country Wife* for his plot, and wrote up to that. The Duke of Buckingham's *Rehearsal* forms the framework of the *Critic.* When he had thus fixed his mind upon an intrigue or plot that he thought might be turned to account, and settled a few of his characters, he seems to have scribbled

down loosely everything that struck his fancy—bits of conversation, traits of character, epigrams, &c. He drew up in this way a plan for a comedy upon *Affectation.* What the plot of this play was to be, I have no conception. Probably he had none in his own mind. The subject, however, struck him apparently as one that might be turned to account; and taking up one of his copy-books, he wrote on its first leaf, in his neatest hand, "Affectation," added two or three names—Sir Babble Bore, Sir Peregrine Paradox, and Feignwit—as suggestions, probably, that arose on the spur of the moment, and then added at different times a catalogue of the "affectations" that he meant to satirise. Here they are: "An affectation of Business, of Accomplishments, of Love of Letters and Wit, Music, of Intrigue, of Sensibility, of Vivacity, of Silence and Importance, of Modesty, of Profligacy, of Moroseness." Here, too, are the skeletons of a brace of the characters whom he intended to work up:

"Character, Mr. Bustle.—A man who delights in hurry and interruption—will take any one's business for them; leaves word where all his plagues may follow him; governor of all hospitals, &c.; share in Ranelagh: speaker everywhere, from the Vestry to the House of Commons. 'I am not at home. Gad, now he has heard me, and I must be at home.'—'Here am I so plagued, and there is nothing I love so much as retirement and quiet.'—'You

never sent after me.' Let servants call in to him such a message as: 'Tis nothing but the window-tax,' he hiding in a room that communicates. A young man tells him some important business in the middle of fifty trivial interruptions, and the calling of idlers; such as fiddlers, wild-beast men, foreigners with recommendatory letters, &c. Answers notes on his knee: 'And so your uncle died?—for your obliging inquiries—and left you an orphan—to cards in the evening.'

"Can't bear to be doing nothing.—'Can I do anything for anybody anywhere?' 'Have been to the Secretary—written to the Treasury.' 'Must proceed to meet the Commissioner's, and write Mr. Price's little boy's exercise.' The most active idler and laborious trifler.

"He does not in reality love business—only the appearance of it. 'Ha, ha! Did my Lord say that I was always very busy?—What! Plagued to death?'

"Keeps all his letters and copies.—'Mem. to meet the Hackney-coach Commissioners—to arbitrate between, &c.'

"Contrast with the man of indolence, his brother. —'So, brother, just up, and I have been, &c.' One will give his money from indolent generosity; the other his time from restlessness. 'Twill be shorter to pay the bill than look for the receipt.' Files letters, answered and unanswered. 'Why, here are more unopened than answered!"

When he had thus formed a rough and ready conception of his principal characters in his own mind, he began scribbling dialogue. This, in its original form, is generally of a very loose and wordy description, often without point or wit. Moore thinks this was more in the way of experiment than anything else—to take the chance of a trump of wit or humour turning up. It was hardly ever used, although you may now and then, in comparing the rough draft with the finished copy, trace a passage here and there with little or no alteration. All the best hits, however, were carefully picked out and worked up afresh. A striking illustration of this occurs in the *School for Scandal.* "People who utter a scandal, knowing it to be forged," says Sir Peter Teazle in a speech in the rough draft, "deserve the pillory more than for a forged bank-note. They can't pass the lie without putting their names on the back of it. You say no person has a right to come on you because you didn't invent it; but you should know that, if the drawer of the lie is out of the way, the injured party has a right to come upon any of the indorsers." In the finished copy, this thought was brought out in the dialogue with Mr. Candour in this form:

"*Mrs. Candour.* But sure you would not be quite so severe on those who only report what they hear?"

"*Sir P.* Yes, madam, I would have law-merchant for them too; and in all cases of slander currency, whenever the drawer of the lie was not to be found,

the injured party should have a right to come on any of the indorsers."

I could cite a dozen instances of this kind; for a striking thought or comparison of this description reappears time after time in a variety of forms, and is sometimes transferred from character to character, in order to set it where it will tell with the greatest effect. Sheridan was a miser in thought.

His manuscript very closely resembles that of Byron. It is for the most part an illegible scrawl, full of corrections and interlineations. And this is not the only point of resemblance between the poet and the dramatist. Sheridan, like Byron, was in the habit of prompting his genius by reading the plays which chimed in with his own thoughts, when preparing for composition, and hence, as in Byron, passages are continually turning up which bear a very close analogy to those of other writers. These coincidences were probably in the mass of cases quite unconscious; but Sheridan never scrupled, either in his speeches, his verses, or his plays, about using any thought or expression that happened to suit his purpose. The authorship was to him a matter of no concern. He thought everything his own, like Molière, that happened to suit his purpose: and looking through the correspondence and diaries of the politicians and wits of that time you may find scores of complaints about the way in which Sheridan appropriated everything worth appropriating that he hap-

pened to hear in the smoking room of Brookes' or at dinner. His comparison of Lord Sidmouth's Administration to Theseus was taken from a letter of Gilbert Wakefield's to Fox. Fox did not intend to make use of the suggestion himself in the House of Commons, but he showed the letter to two or three of his friends at Brookes'. Sheridan heard of the illustration—it was a quotation from Aristophanes—got Dr. Parr to translate it for him, and introduced it very aptly into his speech on the Treaty of Peace with Paris. Its success was tremendous. "The House was so delighted," said a member, relating the story to Sir James Mackintosh, "that Sheridan might have gone up to the Speaker and pulled off his wig." His two jokes, too, upon the Bourbons and the Peace were appropriations. The first Lord Holland said was Sir A. Pigott's. The second was Francis'; and Francis was very irate about the robbery. But everything that Sheridan appropriated in this way he turned to the best use, and generally perhaps to far better account than the authors themselves could. This was acknowledged in one case by a wit from whom Sheridan was always prigging. "I don't know how it is," said the fleeced wit, "but a thing that falls flat from me passes as an excellent joke when retailed second-hand by Sheridan. I never like my own *bon mots* till he adopts them." And it was just the same with Sheridan's songs. They were nearly all plagiarisms. "Ask'st thou how long my love will stay?"

was taken from an Essay of Hume's—the Epicurean. Its original authors were Monteuil and Menage.

Sheridan's hours of composition were those of night; and, like Sir Walter Scott, he was very fond of a profusion of lights. But, according to Tierney, and Tierney ought to be a good authority, Sheridan had a habit when preparing himself for any great occasion, of rising at four in the morning, lighting up a prodigious quantity of candles around him, and of eating toasted muffins whilst at work, and when preparing himself, like this, no man worked harder. But, like Tasso, Sheridan thought wine a great help in composition; and when he sat down to work, it was generally with a bottle of Madeira at his side. "If the thought is slow to come," he used to say, "a glass of good wine encourages it; and, when it *does* come, a glass of good wine rewards it."

SYDNEY SMITH.

WHAT would the world be without its wits? Perhaps we might dispense with an epic poet or two. I should not die of a broken heart if all the works upon metaphysics and political economy were to disappear to-morrow. A few of us might possibly survive the extinction of the whole race of three-vol. novelists; and we should not all of us be quite inappeasable in our grief if the *Times* of to-morrow were to announce that by some mysterious and inexplicable accident on the part of the Librarian of the British Museum, the mass of second-hand literature which now rears its front of brass against gods, men, and columns, had shared the fate of the MSS. Library at Alexandria. But Sheridan and Colman, Charles Lamb and Douglas Jerrold, Curran and Sydney Smith —what would life be without these? Abolish all their epigrams, all their *bon mots*, all the relics of their wit, make it penal to quote a single sentence from any of them, compel every man to manufacture his own *jeux d'esprit*, and what would life be worth? How should we contrive to get through a single dinner party? Who would have the courage to look at a newspaper article? How would the House of Commons get through a debate upon Law Reform, Irish Land

Tenure, Life Peerages, or Primogeniture and Entail?

To take an illustration or two. Suppose it a penal offence to quote, or to adapt, Sidney Smith's epigrams on Lord Russell, Dr. Whewell, and Macaulay, to talk of a man of superabundant self-confidence as a man ready at a moment's notice to take the command of the Channel fleet, or to cut for the stone; to tell Professor Huxley, for instance, that his forte is cutting up monkeys, and his foible cutting up men; to compare the Librarian at Lambeth Palace to a book in breeches, or to talk of Mr. Gladstone's flashes of silence. Suppose every parson under an interdict never to apologize for an inappropriate text by citing the authority of the Canon of St. Paul's for the use of "Cappadocia, Pamphilia, Phrygia, and all the regions round about," so long as the sermon was sensible; or to sneer at Dissenters as people who never keep a carriage in the second generation. Suppose the Editor of the *Times* bound over in £10,000 never again to throw out a suggestion about locking up two or three Bishops in a railway carriage, and squeezing them to death in a tunnel, in order to encourage the House of Lords to take up the question of Railway Reform; to talk about putting round men in square holes, and square men in round holes; or to tell a poet or novelist, in a slashing criticism upon his first work, to run his pen through every second word in his MS., in order to add to the vigour of his

style. Suppose the Rochefoucauld's of the *Saturday Review* interdicted talking of benevolence as one of the instincts of the human heart, with the alphabetical illustration of A no sooner seeing B in distress than he thinks C ought to do something for him; suppose the Lord Chancellor to issue an order under the Great Seal against any of the officials of the Circumlocution Office vindicating the use of red tape as one of the grammars of life, or that the Lord Chamberlain were to request the comic papers to forego, for, say, the summer months, the exquisite gratification of sneering at the *wut* of Mr. Duncan Maclaren and his kilted colleagues, and of the necessity of a surgical operation to get their own jokes well into a Scotch understanding;—suppose Sydney Smith and all his jokes, and all his wild nonsense, in short, put in an *Index*, what a sense of intellectual dearth and barrenness would pervade all of us! You might as well take the ozone out of the sea breezes, or the hydrogen out of the atmosphere. Shut up Mr. Beales and Mr. Odger in Pentonville, or compel them, if they must divert themselves with a species of amateur conspiracy, to enter into a conspiracy of silence; set down an epicure to a dinner of herbs; refuse the Book of Nehemiah to an Orthodox Dissenter; take away the chasuble and the stole from a Ritualist; commit any outrage of this description, and the victims may submit with the spirit of martyrs. But abolish *Punch* by Act of Parliament, disinherit

John Bull of his *Joe Miller*, of the stock of wit and humour that has been handed down to him from generation to generation, with Magna Charta and the writ of Habeus Corpus, and all England would be in arms to-morrow. The thought of tyranny of this refined and inhuman description is too terrible to contemplate. Even the millenium without Voltaire and Rabelais, Tom Jones and Don Juan, would be to most of us what the hunting grounds across the Styx would be to a Blackfoot Indian without his horse and his dogs, or Paradise without its houris to a Turk. Perhaps we might contrive to exist as turtles do after Mr. Lewes has scooped their brains out for microscopical analysis. But what an existence! "Ah, mon pauvre maître," exclaimed Guizot's cook, when he heard that his master was dining at the Athenæum, "je ne le reverrai, plus." And we may say pretty much the same of John Bull: he might still dine, perhaps, still talk politics, still chat about Exchequer Bills and Tariffs, the Bank Rate, and the Three per Cents.; but without his wits and humourists, the charm of life would be gone.

And of these there is none whom we could spare less than Sydney Smith. He is among wits what Horace is among poets. He is a genial, well-bred, well-read man of the world. His wit, like Voltaire's, is the wit of everybody; and it is wit that you can quote upon every topic of talk that starts up in the House of Commons, in the newspapers, at an archi-

diaconal luncheon, on the croquet lawn, or in a club smoking-room. Possessing powers equal to those of Swift and Sheridan, of Curran and Jerrold, Sydney Smith was free from everything like coarseness and cynicism, from everything like buffoonery and bitterness. His wit is always pure, always human. There is no affectation, no vice, in his tone or in his temper. He lays no little traps to surprise, never talks up to a subject to fire off the *bon mots* he has been manufacturing at his desk in the morning. He simply puts into terse and sparkling sentences happy thoughts that we all think we could have thrown out ourselves had we formed one of the party; and his conversation and his writing are to us, when analysed, simply the conversation and writing of a man of keen and decisive intelligence—of a man who knows no more of the question than you or I, but who has the knack of looking at it in perspective, of taking in all that can be said upon it at a glance, of seizing the most striking points of the argument, turning the weak ones inside out, making the strong ones his own, and of throwing out his own thoughts and criticisms as the inspiration of the moment, in the dashing, off-hand style of a man of high spirits and of brilliant intellect.

He was not a thinker: his pulse ran too high for original thought. He rarely troubled himself to think a subject out in logical form, to think it out, that is, as a barrister thinks out his brief. He seized upon its strongest points by a sort of instinct, upon the

striking and picturesque points that attract dull and clever people alike, and these by the mere force of wit and imagination he made his own. His arguments upon Parliamentary Reform, Catholic Emancipation, and the Ballot, are all arguments that he might have picked up at Sam Rogers's breakfast table or in Lady Holland's drawing-room. They are all the arguments of the ideal "international man" whom we picture to ourselves when we wish to look at a question without prejudice and without cant. Yet these were the arguments that carried the Reform Bill, that carried the Catholic Relief Bill, that swept away the Test and Corporation Acts; and after they had been put in their most vivid forms by the wit of Sydney Smith, everyone adopted them as his own. Sydney Smith's views after that seemed to be the only views that a man of sense and wit could hold. They were the views at once of the statesman and of the diner-out who thought it is business to look at every political question from what Thackeray called the "don't-care-a-damn" point of view. Look at his pamphlet on the Ballot. "It was all flash and sparkle," said Mr. Grote and Sir John Bowring. All its arguments had been put and refuted, perhaps, in a way, dozens of times in the House of Commons. But as these arguments are put by Sydney Smith it is simply impossible to refute them. In his hands you can do no more with them than you can do with Hume's perplexing syllogism about miracles. "If a

man is sheltered from intimidation, is it at all clear that he would vote from any better motive than intimidation? The landlord has perhaps said a cross word to the tenant; the candidate for whom the tenant votes in opposition to his landlord has taken his second son for a footman, or his father knew the candidate's grandfather: how many thousand votes, sheltered (as the ballotists suppose) from intimidation, would be given from such silly motives as these? how many would be given from the mere discontent of inferiority? or from that strange, simious, schoolboy passion of giving pain to others, even when the author cannot be found out?—motives as pernicious as any which could proceed from intimidation . . . . . The real object is to vote for the good politician, not for the kind-hearted or agreeable man: the mischief is just the same to the country whether I am smiled into a corrupt choice, or frowned into a corrupt choice. What is it to me whether my landlord is the best of landlords or the most agreeable of men? I must vote for Joseph Hume, if I think Joseph more honest than the Marquis. The more mitigated Radical may pass over this, but the real carnivorous variety of the animal should declaim as loudly against the fascinations as against the threats of the great. The man who possesses the land should never speak to the man who tills it. The intercourse between landlord and tenant should be as strictly guarded as that of the sexes in Turkey. A funded duenna should

be placed over every landed grandee. 'I am a professed Radical,' said the tenant of a great duke to a friend of mine, 'and the duke knows it; but if I vote for his candidates, he lets me talk as I please, live with whom I please, and does not care if I dine at a Radical dinner every day in the week. If there was a ballot, nothing could persuade the duke, or the duke's master, the steward, that I was not deceiving them, and I should lose my farm in a week. This is the real history of what would take place. The single lie on the hustings would not suffice; the concealed democrat who voted against his landlord must talk with the wrong people, subscribe to the wrong club, huzza at the wrong dinner, break the wrong head, lead (if he wished to escape from the watchful jealousy of his landlord) a long life of lies between every election; and he must do this, not only *eundo*, in his calm and prudential state, but *redeundo* from the market, warmed with beer and expanded by alcohol; and he must not only carry on his seven years of dissimulation before the world, but in the very bosom of his family, or he must expose himself to the dangerous garrulity of wife, children, and servants, from whose indiscretion every kind of evil report would be carried to the ears of the watchful steward . . . . The noise and jollity of a ballot mob must be such as the very devils would look on with delight. A set of deceitful wretches wearing the wrong colours, abusing their friends, pelting the man

for whom they voted, drinking their enemies' punch, knocking down persons with whom they entirely agreed, and roaring out eternal duration to principles they abhorred. A scene of wholesale bacchanalian fraud, a *posse comitatus* of liars which would disgust any man with a free government, and make him sigh for the monocracy of Constantinople."

These sentences of Sydney Smith contain the germ-thoughts of half the arguments and of half the sarcasms that the wits of the House of Commons, of Printing House Square, and of Northumberland Street now fire off against the Ballot. You cannot answer them. You cannot improve upon them. They represent with terseness and wit the only views that the mass of people will ever think of taking of the ballot box. He supplied the Peace Society, again, with a more telling description of the consequences of war than any of their own orators have yet been able to strike out for themselves; and in his essay on classical education he brought together, in a terse and vivid form, most of the arguments against the present system of teaching Latin and Greek that have since been used by Mr. Lowe and Professor Huxley. "Everyone will admit that of all the disgusting labours of life, the labour of lexicon and dictionary is the most intolerable. Nor is there a greater object of compassion than a fine boy, full of animal spirits, set down on a bright sunny day, with a heap of un-

known words before him, to be turned into English before supper, by the help of a ponderous dictionary alone. The object in looking into a dictionary can only be to exchange an unknown sound for one that is known. Now, it seems indisputable that the sooner this exchange is made the better. The greater the number of such exchanges which can be made in a given time, the greater is the progress, the more abundant the *copia verborum* obtained by the scholar. Would it not be of advantage if the dictionary at once opened at the required page, and if a self-moving index at once pointed to the requisite word? Is any advantage gained to the world by the time employed first in finding the letter P, and then in finding the three guiding letters P R I? This appears to us to be pure loss of time, justifiable only if it is inevitable; and even after this is done, what an infinite multitude of difficulties are heaped at once upon the wretched beginner! Instead of his being reserved for his greater skill and maturity in the language, he must employ himself in discovering in which of many senses which his dictionary presents the word is to be used; in considering the case of the substantive, and the syntaxical arrangement in which it is to be placed, and the relation it bears to other words. The loss of time in the merely mechanical part of the old plan is immense. We doubt very much if an average boy, between ten and fourteen, will look out or find more than sixty words

in an hour; we say nothing at present of the time employed in thinking of the meaning of each word when he has found it, but of the mere naked discovery of the word in the lexicon or dictionary. It must be remembered, we say an *average* boy—not what Master Evans, the show boy, can do, nor what Master Macarthy, the boy who is whipped every day, can do, but some boy between Macarthy and Evans; and not what the medium boy can do while his mastigophorous superior is frowning over him, but what he actually does when left in the midst of noisy boys, and with a recollection that, by sending to the neighbouring shop, he can obtain any quantity of unripe gooseberries upon credit. Now, if this statement be true, and if there are 10,000 words in the Gospel of St. John, here are 160 hours employed in the mere digital process of turning over leaves! But, in much less time than this, any boy of average quickness might learn, by the Hamiltonian method, to construe the whole four Gospels with the greatest accuracy and the most scrupulous correctness. The interlineal translation, of course, spares the trouble and time of this mechanical labour . . . . The Hamilton method begins with what all persons want, a facility of construing, and leaves every scholar to become afterwards as profound in grammar as he (or those who educate him) may choose; whereas the old method aims at making all more profound grammarians than three-fourths wish to be, or than nine-

teen-twentieths *can* be. One of the enormous follies of the enormously foolish education in England, is, that all young men—dukes, fox-hunters, and merchants—are educated as if they were to keep a school and serve a curacy; while scarcely an hour in the Hamiltonian education is lost for any variety of life. A grocer may learn enough of Latin to taste the sweets of Virgil; a cavalry officer may read and understand Homer without knowing that ἵημι comes from εω with a smooth breathing, and that it is formed by an improper reduplication. In the meantime, there is nothing in that education which prevents a scholar from knowing (if he wishes to know) what Greek compounds draw back their accents. He may trace verbs in ἰμι, from polysyllables in ἰω, or derive endless glory from marking down derivatives in πτω, changing the ε of their primitives into iota." This was his style. No artifice, no affectation, nothing like pedantry. Ordinary arguments, or at least the arguments of people of average intelligence and culture, set in brilliant and vivid forms. It was irresistible with most people: it was taking with all. You may trace the germ of all his arguments in this paper, for instance, in Locke and in Hamilton's own prefaces. But neither of them knew how to do justice to their thoughts as Sydney Smith did. He barbed their sense and logic with his wit; and everything that he thus set his mark upon he made his own. His mind was, as Mr.

Disraeli said of Sir Robert Peel's, a vast appropriation clause.

"When he had any subject on hand," Lady Holland tells us, "he was indefatigable in reading, searching, inquiring, seeking every source of information, and discussing it with any man of sense or cultivation who crossed his path." And I have heard this illustrated by the personal recollections of those who knew him at Coombe Florey. If in preparing his articles for the *Edinburgh Review* any point happened to turn up that he did not comprehend, he spared no pains in hunting up books or practical authorities, and frequently tested an argument or an illustration that he felt doubtful about, by throwing it out for criticism in conversation. Most of the points of his Ballot article were put through this test. You may often trace this in the writings themselves. Their tone is the tone of his conversation and of his correspondence. He ticks and toys with a book of travels, a blue book, or a bit of French fiction, as he might have toyed with it standing by his own fireside at Foxton with his girls by his side, or in Lady Holland's boudoir. It requires but a slight effort of the imagination in taking up his volume of contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* to picture him at his desk, or standing with his back to a chair, laughing at Colonel Collins's arguments about the settlement of Botany Bay—at the argument, for instance, that we shall

receive hereafter an ample equivalent, in bales of goods, for all the vices we export—speculating upon the sort of apologies that an Australian sheep farmer in the Blue Mountains might send to the Court when summoned to serve on a jury: "The waters of the Hawkesbury are out, and I have a mile to swim —the kangaroo will break into my corn—the convicts have robbed me—my little boy has been bitten by an ornithorynchus paradoxus—I have sent a man fifty miles with a sack of flour to buy a pair of breeches for the assizes, and he is not returned"—tracing out analogies between the settlements of America and Australia, and throwing out prophecies of what might happen in the days, perhaps, of Edward the Tenth, when, to assert our sovereignty over an important and flourishing colony, endless blood and treasure will be exhausted to support a tax on kangaroos' skins, faithful Commons will go on voting fresh supplies to support a just and necessary war, and Newgate, then become a quarter of the world, will evince a heroism not unworthy of the great characters by whom she was originally peopled; —or, playing with this idea from another point of view, anticipating the day when some Botany Bay Tacitus shall record the crimes of an emperor lineally descended from a London pickpocket, or paint the valour with which he has led his New Hollanders into the heart of China; or, varying his humour and setting the table in a roar over his description of the

freaks of Nature at the Antipodes, in making cherries with the stone on the outside, a monstrous animal as tall as a grenadier, with the head of a rabbit, a tail as big as a bed-post, hopping along at the rate of five hops to a mile, with three or four young kangaroos looking out of its false uterus to see what is passing, a quadruped as big as a large cat, with the eyes, colour, and skin of a mole, and the bill and web feet of a duck, puzzling Dr. Shaw, and rendering the latter half of his life miserable, from his utter inability to determine whether it was a bird or a beast; and a parrot, with the legs of a sea-gull, a skate, with the head of a shark, and a bird of such monstrous dimensions, that a side bone of it will dine three real carnivorous Englishmen. This was his style in reviewing. It was not criticism, like Jeffrey's. It was the laughing, rollicking nonsense of a man of rare wit and imagination talking about the book, with a pen in his hand, exactly as he talked about it in his own easy chair at Foxton, or at his table in Green Street. "Lightness and flimsiness," he used to say, "are my style in reviewing," but hundreds of people read Sydney Smith's nonsense who never thought of cutting the leaves to look at a page of Jeffrey's metaphysics or Brougham's politics. His fine Roman hand is generally distinguishable in the first sentence. His description of Dr. Parr's wig, for instance, trespassing a little on the orthodox magnitude of perukes in the anterior parts, but

scorning even episcopal limits behind, and swelling out into boundless convexity of frizz, and the comparison of the style of his wig with the style of his sermons; his account of the Society for the Suppression of Vice as a society for suppressing the vices of people with incomes of less than £500 a year, and his suggestion that they should prove their honesty and their courage by sending a Duchess to the Poultry Compter, or their consistency by establishing a society of barbers, butchers, and bakers, in order to put all classes on an equal footing, to return to the higher classes that moral character by which they are so highly benefited;—his comparison of the notes of the campaners in the Forest of Cayenne, distinguishable three miles off, to the belfry of a cathedral, ringing for a new dean, just appointed on account of shabby politics, small understanding, and good family;—his suggestion that Mr. Waterton's illustration of a nondescript species of monkey was the head of a Master in Chancery, and his criticism upon the impropriety of travellers thus trifling with science and natural history;—his description of the boa constrictor swallowing the tortoise whole, shell and all, and consuming him slowly in the interior, as the Court of Chancery does a great estate—are all in the exact style of his talk. Here is an example of the way in which he gathered up in his recollection a host of incidents to exemplify the pleasures of life in the tropics, and threw them

out in an avalanche of wit: "The *bête rouge* lays the foundation of a tremendous ulcer. In a moment you are covered with ticks. Chigoes bury themselves in your flesh, and hatch a large colony of young chigoes in a few hours. They will not live together, but every chigoe sets up a separate ulcer, and has his own private portion of pus. Flies get entry into your mouth, into your eyes, into your nose; you eat flies, drink flies, and breathe flies. Lizards, cockroaches and snakes get into your bed; ants eat up the books; scorpions sting you on the foot. Everything bites, stings, or bruises; every second of your existence you are wounded by some piece of animal life that nobody has ever seen before, except Swammerdam and Meriain. An insect with eleven legs is swimming in your tea-cup; a nondescript with nine wings is struggling in the small beer; or a caterpillar with several dozen eyes in his belly, is hastening over the bread and butter! All nature is alive, and seems to be gathering all her entomological hosts to eat you up, as you are standing, out of your coat, waistcoat, and breeches. Such," he says, reflecting upon his own description, "are the tropics, and all this, of course, may well reconcile us to our dews, fogs, vapours, and drizzle—to our apothecaries, rushing about with gargles and tinctures—to our old British constitutional coughs, sore throats, and swelled faces." In passages like this we have Sydney Smith before us, with all his wit and

imagination. It is the tone of his conversation all over. There was nothing like study or premeditation about it. His wit was always fresh. It never smelt of the lamp, like Sheridan's. "You always find the dew on it." Perhaps now and then you may detect him reproducing in his conversation a thought that he had touched in his correspondence, or working out an idea in one letter that he has only half developed in another; but even in cases of this sort, it is generally sufficiently obvious that the thought is reproduced simply because it is floating about in his memory, rather than from the want of fresh ideas; and it is reproduced generally with such a profusion of fresh wit and imagery, that it has all the air of an original flight of fancy. Take, for instance, his whimsical note to Lady Grey, beseeching her to put my lord's pistols and powder flasks out of his reach. "For God's sake do not drag me into another war! I am worn down, and worn out, with crusading and defending Europe, and protecting mankind; I *must* think a little of myself. I am sorry for the Spaniards—I am sorry for the Greeks—I deplore the fate of the Jews; the people of the Sandwich Islands are groaning under the most detestable tyranny; Bagdad is oppressed—I do not like the present state of the Delta—Thibet is not comfortable. Am I to fight for all these people? The world is bursting with sin and sorrow. Am I to be champion of the Decalogue, and to be eternally

raising fleets and armies to make all men good and happy? We have just done saving Europe, and I am afraid the consequence will be that we shall cut each other's throats. No war, dear Lady Grey!—no eloquence; but apathy, selfishness, common sense, arithmetic!" He had struck the key-note of this in a hasty note, written days previously to Mrs. Meynell, and he plays with its germ-thought in two or three forms in several of his letters, written almost concurrently with this. Here, however, in his note to Lady Grey, it comes out in full and perfect form; and in this form I once heard Mr. Cobden at dinner recommend it as the wittiest and most sensible motto he could find for the Manchester party.

Sydney Smith's conversation was the conversation of a man mad with spirits, of a man, to use his own expression who must either talk, laugh, or burst, the conversation of a man whose intellect bred analogies and picturesque imagery as the sun breeds clouds. Take him when or where you might, you never took him by surprise; and most of the brightest illustrations of his wit, like Douglas Jerrold's, were those which he struck out on the spur of the moment. His reply, for instance, to the beautiful girl who complained, "Oh, Mr. Sydney, this pea will never come to perfection," "Then permit me to lead perfection to the pea," is in its style perfect. Even French wit and chivalry have never equalled that; and in the Court of Louis XIV. it would have been crowned

with a Cardinal's hat. His reply to the Archbishop of York—"I hear, Mr. Smith, that you do not approve of much riding for the clergy," "Why, my lord, perhaps there is not *much* objection, provided they do not ride too well, and stick out their toes professionally," was very keen; for Sydney Smith could never sit a horse, and his diocesan was one of the finest horsemen in a province where every boy is born in the saddle, and rides by instinct. There was a touch of the courtier as well as of the wit in his reply to the lady who, arguing in a large party that it was always high tide at London Bridge at twelve o'clock, appealed to him with, "Now, Mr. Smith, is it not so?" "It used not to be so, I believe, formerly, but perhaps the Lord Mayor and Aldermen have altered it lately." He traced out the analogies of things with marvellous quickness. A man at his side reckons the amount of his ground-rent at £5 a foot. "Ah, the price of a London footman six feet high, thirty guineas a year." Upon a couple of talkers, "There is the same difference between their tongues as between the hour and the minute hand: one goes ten times as fast, and the other signifies ten times as much." "If you masthead a sailor for not doing his duty, why should you not weathercock a parishioner for refusing to pay tithes?" Of a poet who wrote with great labour—"How is Rogers?" "He is not very well." "Why what is the matter?" "Oh, don't you know he has pro-

duced a couplet? When our friend is delivered of a couplet, with infinite labour and pain, he takes to his bed, has straw laid down, the knocker tied up, expects his friends to call and make enquiries, and the answer at the door invariably is, 'Mr. Rogers and is little couplet are as well as can be expected.' When he produces an Alexandrine he keeps his bed a day longer." Of a New Zealand attorney—"There is a New Zealand attorney, just arrived in London, with 6s. 8d. tattooed all over his face;" and of illusions—"We naturally lose illusions as we get older, like teeth, but there is no Cartwright to fit a new set into our understandings. I have, alas, only one illusion left, and that is the Archbishop of Canterbury."

Combining a vivid imagination with this brilliant gift of hitting upon analogies, with these high spirits, and this fluency of expression, Sydney Smith was as a talker irresistible; and, except Macaulay, he generally talked every guest at a table into silence. His habit was, as he said, to fire right across the table, and to talk upon any subject that happened to be started, rarely starting anything of his own. Byron calls him, in Don Juan,

"The loudest wit I e'er was deafened with;"

and that is the general testimony. He and Macaulay together set the table in confusion, appalled quiet

people, made them eat the wrong dishes, and drink the wrong wines. It was impossible for either of them to hear the other speak. It was, however, when talking against Macaulay, at Holland House or at Rogers's, that he talked his best; but, unlike most wits, he owed none of his excitement to wine. Wine generally depressed his spirits, as it did Byron's; and when he had drank nothing but a glass of barley water he was in his highest spirits. These were his happiest hours of inspiration; and the slightest hint set him off striking out analogies, playing with them in his imagination, and adorning them with the flowers of his fancy. And you could generally trace his wit, as it were, in the process of manufacture. That was one of the charms of his conversation. His intellect was like an electric coil; you touched it, and it flashed out in sparkling coruscations at the touch. The conversation at one of Rogers's breakfasts turns upon American birds. "My dear Rogers," says Smith, "if we were both in America, we should be tarred and feathered; and, lovely as we are by nature, I should be an ostrich and you an emu." Sir Charles Lyell's book is brought on the carpet, and people wonder what sort of a spectacle our era will present to the Sir Charles Lyell of the next geological epoch. "Yes, imagine an excavation on the site of St. Paul's; fancy a lecture, by the Owen of some future age, on the thigh-bone of a Minor Canon, or the tooth of a Dean—the form,

qualities, the knowledge, tastes, propensities, he would discover from them." It was in this spirit that, picturing the embarrassments of the London University, he drew his sketch of the bailiffs seizing on the air-pump, the exhausted receiver, and galvanic batteries, and chasing the Professor of Modern History round the quadrangle. His list of tortures—dooming Mrs. Marcet, for example, to listen for a thousand years to conversations between Caroline and Emily, where Caroline should always give wrong explanations in chemistry, and Emily, in the end, be unable to distinguish an acid from an alkali; and Macaulay to have false dates and facts of the reign of Queen Anne for ever shouted in his ears, all liberal and honest opinions ridiculed in his presence and not able to say a single word in their defence, was thrown off in a conversation at Romilly's on the tortures that Dante had invented. And so, too, was his description of the Utilitarians. "That man is so hard," says Smith, criticising a quotation from Mr. James Mill, or one of the Westminster Reviewers, "that you might drive a broad-wheeled waggon over him, and it would produce no impression; if you were to bore holes in him with a gimlet, I am convinced sawdust would come out of him. He and his school treat mankind as if they were mere machines; the feelings or affections never enter into their calculations. If everything is to be sacrificed to utility, why do you bury your grandmother at all? why don't

you cut her into small pieces at once, and make portable soup of her?"

Yet, Sydney Smith's wit, after all, was but the flavour of his mind. Of course, people who knew nothing of him but as a diner-out of the first water, and took their estimate of his character by the witty nonsense they heard him pouring forth when talking, over a glass of wine, *à tort et à travers*, quoting the anathema of the Clerk of the General Assembly upon the Solemn League and Covenant for spoiling the longs and shorts in Scotland, and relating how at College he had broken a chess-board over the head of the Archbishop of Canterbury, suggesting that a Tory Dean ought to be preached to death by wild curates, praying that Spring Rice would go into holy orders, talking of the secret wish of his heart to roast a Quaker, arguing that the Jews should be kept for the private tyranny and intolerance of the bishops —"Thirty thousand Jews, it is but a small matter! do not be too hard upon the Church;" recommending the Bishop of New Zealand to serve up roast missionary, with cold curate on the sideboard, for the entertainment of the Maori chiefs, rallying the bishops for living vindictively, and evincing their aversion to a Whig Ministry by improved health, hoaxing innocent dowagers by telling them that a cherub had been caught in the Blue Mountains, or that his dog was in the habit of eating a parish boy every morning for breakfast, and recommending them, when the

thermometer was in the nineties, to take off their skin and sit in their bones, as he did; throwing out wild conjectures upon the possibility of the existence of a world where men and women are all made of stone, or perhaps of Parian marble, and shouting out to Sir Roderick Murchison to ask how he would like to pass eternity with a greywacke woman; talking about confounding the number of the Muses with the Thirty-nine Articles when he took an extra glass of wine, and setting himself right by repeating the lines, and finding "Descend ye Thirty-nine" two feet too long—thought him a very clever and witty man, but, perhaps, a joker of jokes, and nothing more. These people knew nothing of the depth and richness of his mind. The flash and sparkle of his thought were so dazzling that none but those who knew him well—knew him, that is, in his quiet and soberer moods—gave him credit for the power of thought, the sense, and prudence that formed the fibre of his intellect. Yet few men possessed higher powers of thought, of eloquence, of earnestness, of courage, than Sydney Smith. Possessing as much wit as a man without a grain of his sense, he had as much sense as a man without a spark of his wit. But he had one fault. He did not understand the art of cant: he never thought of his cloth. His serious conversation with two or three friends on the lawn at Coombe Florey was like the serious conversation of Charles Lamb, superior to that of his lighter and

gayer hours. But, like Macaulay's flashes of silence, these lapses of Sydney Smith into the proprieties of conversation, into thought and philosophy, and iced common sense, were reserved for his own fireside, and for the friends of his fireside. Take up his sermons, or run your eye through the reflections and precepts which he notes in his diary, and you see at once what a vein of deep religious thought ran through his nature, what pure and noble conceptions he formed of life, and of his own work as a Christian minister. But even here you may trace the hand of the wit in his criticism upon the false sentiments of religion and philosophy. He ranked a comfortable house as a source of happiness next to health and a pure conscience. "To be unhappy is the luxury of a false religion." "No reflecting man could ever wish to adulterate manly piety (the parent of all that is good in the world) with mummery and parade. But we are strange, very strange creatures, and it is better, perhaps, not to place too much confidence in our reason alone. If anything, there is, perhaps, too little pomp and ceremony in our worship, instead of too much. We quarrelled with the Roman Catholic Church in a great hurry and a great passion, and furious with spleen; clothed ourselves with sackcloth because she was habited in brocade; rushing, like children, from one extreme to another, and blind to all medium between complication and barrenness, formality and neglect." "Moralists tell you of the

evils of wealth and station, and the happiness of poverty. I have been very poor the greatest part of my life, and have borne it as well, I believe, as most people; but I can safely say that I have been happier every guinea I have gained." "How exquisitely absurd to tell girls that beauty is of no value, dress of no use! Beauty is of value; her whole prospects and happiness in life may often depend upon a new gown or a becoming bonnet, and if she has five grains of common sense she will find this out. The great thing is to teach her their just value, and that there must be something better under the bonnet than a pretty face for real happiness. But never sacrifice truth."

Upon matters of business, too, upon anything affecting the administration of his parish, or his duties as a Canon of Bristol or St. Paul's, or as a country gentleman and a magistrate, Sydney Smith was as prompt, as energetic, and as business-like as a man who never made a joke in his life. Looking upon the country as a kind of healthy grave, believing that most of the happiness of life was to be found in association with the bad weather, coal fires, and good society of a crowded city, and that the main use of the country was to give one a keener relish for London life, Sydney Smith settled down upon a Yorkshire vicarage in the spirit of a man who had talked of turnips and dogs, and drank ale with his grooms all his life, and in a couple of years this

"powerful son of Heaven," this prince of dinner-table wits, the rival of Talleyrand, of Canning, and of Frere, was the life and soul of a village, where, as he said, people only dined out once in seven years, and where, except then, nothing was visible but crows. He built his own house without the assistance of an architect, farmed his own glebe with the aid of a speaking trumpet and a telescope in the style of an Illinois squatter, bred horses like the rest of his parishioners, and sat down at his desk at the close of his day's work to throw off articles for the *Edinburgh Review*, and to scribble witty nonsense for Lady Holland and Lady Grey on the books and politics and scandal of the hour, without ever uttering a syllable of peevish complaint about being thrown away, being desolate, or such like trash. At Bristol and at St. Paul's Sydney Smith distinguished himself as the most business-like man in the Chapter; and in dealing with practical questions in the *Edinburgh Review*, with questions like those of Church Government, Penal Settlements, Prison Discipline, and the Game Laws, he dealt with them in the keen hard-headed style of a model Chairman of Quarter Sessions. His papers on Botany Bay and the Game Laws, and his speeches on Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform might all have been addressed to crowded benches in the House of Commons at two o'clock in the morning. They glitter

with wit, like almost everything that he wrote; but their wit is, after all, but the foil of his arguments, and his arguments are those of a statesman, arguments that even the Tory squires would turn over in their minds as they lit their cigars to walk home. Contrast any of these articles of Sydney Smith with the speeches of Sheridan, and you see at once what a mass of tough argument and of hard thought underlies Sydney Smith's wit when he thought it necessary to be anything more than witty. Sheridan, in comparison, is mere tinsel. Possessing powers of raillery equal, at least, to those of Sheridan, Sydney Smith, nevertheless, unlike Sheridan, never thought of depending on these alone in discussing a question of politics or social morality. His forte was logic, and he marshalled his arguments with the tact of a Parliamentary general. He puts his own arguments in the terse and decisive form of the most accomplished master of fence, and he scalps the fallacies of an opponent in the neat and offhand style of that Red Indian of Parliamentary debate, Mr. Lowe. You see at a glance that he is full of his subject, master of all its arguments, and knows all the points of his opponent. He never haggles over a weak argument. He goes to the heart of the question at once, seizes all its strongest points, and works these up in their most powerful and vivid forms. There is an air of touch and go in his style; he deals with every-

thing with an apparently light hand; but analyse his views and his arguments, and in nine cases out of ten you find them characterised by the keen intelligence, good sense, and breadth of a man of the world looking at the matter in the dry light of a political epicurean. And yet, with all this, Sydney Smith always contrives to close his discussion of a serious question in the tone of a man quite in earnest —in the tone of a man, that is, whose convictions are thoroughly ingrained—of a man who, if called upon, can express those convictions with a strength of language corresponding with their depth and intensity in his own mind; but who, relying at present upon their own inherent plausibility, tempers his expressions by the rules of chivalry and good breeding.

Of art and polish, as art and polish were understood by Macaulay, you find no traces in Sydney Smith. His daughter calls him a sort of rough rider of subjects; and the phrase is an apt one. He never troubled himself with the metaphysics of a question; he never troubled himself with its trivialities. Taking up only those topics of talk that were of the directest personal interest, the topics that were under discussion in the House of Commons, in Cathedral Chapters, and at every dinner-table, Sydney Smith selected their most telling points, and then sat down to work these up with his own vigorous understanding, from what I may call the common sense point of view.

And his style is in its way perfect. It is the exact mirror of his thought. He wrote as he talked, wrote, that is, with the dash of a man of keen wit and of high intelligence, rarely revised his manuscript, and left most of his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* to chance and Jeffrey. Take up any of these articles and you have Sydney Smith before you at once, and generally in his best form, in all his brilliance, benevolence, and flashing decision; and by the light of Lady Holland's hints as to her father's habits of work, one can picture him at his fireside galloping through the pages of a thick quarto in the course of a morning, or sitting down at his desk in the evening looking through his papers and his bills with the plodding industry of an attorney's clerk, and then, by way of variation in his employment, taking up his pen to throw off a few pages of "trifling nonsense" for Jeffrey. He wrote with great rapidity. "No hesitation, no erasures, no stopping to consider and round his periods, no writing for effect, but a pouring out of the fulness of his mind and feelings, for he was heart and soul in whatever he undertook. One could see by his countenance how much he was interested or amused as fresh images came clustering round his pen. He hardly ever altered or corrected what he had written; indeed, he was so impatient of this, that he could hardly bear the trouble of even looking over, but would not unfrequently throw the manuscript down on the table as soon as finished, and

say, starting up and addressing his wife, 'There, it is done now, Kate, do look it over, and put in dots to the i's and strokes to the t's.'" And his manuscript needed this revision; for, with the exception of Jeffrey's, it was probably the worst that Constable's printers had to puzzle out for the *Edinburgh Review*. He compared it himself to the hieroglyphics of a swarm of ants escaping from an ink bottle and walking over a sheet of paper without wiping their legs; and when his wife enclosed him an illegible passage from one of his letters from London, containing directions about the management of his farm, and asked for an interpretation, he simply returned it with the explanation that he "must decline ever reading his own handwriting four-and-twenty hours after he had written it." Yet writing, as he generally did, upon the impulse of the moment, often attempting to do nothing more than to reflect his own first impressions, no man ever wrote more consistently, more honestly, or more courageously. "Catch me, if you can," he said, with a touch of pride, when collecting his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* for republication, "in any one illiberal sentiment, or in any opinion which I have need to recant; and that after twenty years' scribbling upon all subjects." And Sydney Smith had reason to think and speak with pride of his writings from this point of view, for, animated as they are by high purpose, and illustrating, as they do, in the

most vivid and brilliant form, his passionate love of justice and common sense, they combine in a rare degree, in their style, English sense, and French wit and form, with the writings of Jeffrey and Macaulay, the most characteristic of the contributions to the *Edinburgh Review.*

LORD MACAULAY.

IF Jeffrey was the critic and metaphysician of the *Edinburgh Review,* Sydney Smith its wit, and Brougham its statesman, Macaulay may be called its rhetorician; and it speaks well for the influence of a picturesque and sparkling style that Macaulay has been able by his style to carry off the highest honours won in our day by a professional man of letters.

He was the first professional man of letters to take up his pen in the service of the *Edinburgh Review.* Till then most of the writers upon it had been amateurs; men, that is, who wrote for pleasure, not for bread. Of late years most of the writers who have distinguished themselves in the ranks of periodical or of general literature have been authors by profession; Charles Dickens, Carlyle, Thackeray, Douglas Jerrold, Tennyson, Froude, Charles Reade, John Forster, Shirley Brooks, and Robertson. Men like Sir Bulwer Lytton and Charles Kingsley, and men like Stuart Mill, Anthony Trollope, Tom Taylor, W. R. Greg, and Arthur Helps, are the exception. But in the early days of the *Edinburgh Review* all this was reversed. You could hardly then have found a dozen professional men of letters of the slightest

note within the four seas. Coleridge, Southey, Tom Moore, Campbell, Lockhart, and Gifford, almost exhaust the list. The rest were newspaper hacks, or what Jeffrey, with a touch of vulgarity, haughtily called "gentlemen writers." Scott and Byron were at the head of the gentlemen writers. The author of the "Waverley Novels" was a clerk at the table of the Court of Session; the author of "The Pleasures of Memory" was a banker in Lombard Street; Christopher North was a professor of moral philosophy; Malthus and Crabbe were country parsons; Charles Lamb was a clerk in Leadenhall Street. And most of these men—all of them, I believe I may say, with the exception of Charles Lamb—were half ashamed of their contributions to the literature of the day. Scott refused to avow his novels. Byron hardly knew what to do with his copyrights, and with the bailiffs at his hall-door, with his household gods all shivered around him, returned Murray a cheque for a thousand guineas for "Childe Harold," rather than pollute his hands by taking money for his writings. To be thought poets by profession, like Wordsworth, or the author of "Christabel," was odious to these men. Scott turned out poems and novels by the score, entering into time-contracts to deliver them, as a Manchester manufacturer enters into contracts to deliver bales of calico, a couple of novels in six months, and a poem of two or three thousand lines in nine months; but with all this, the

work of spinning poetry and romances he set down as a mere incident of his partnership with the Ballantynes—a matter of £ *s. d.*, and nothing more. And it was the same with Byron. The thought of being supposed to possess anything in common with "the *literati* of Murray's back shop" was gall and wormwood to him. "Elaborate," he says, protesting in a rage at the compliments of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Review* on "The Bride of Abydos" and "The Corsair," "elaborate—what do they mean by elaborate? You know they were written as fast as I could put pen to paper, that they were sent to the printer without the slightest revision, and that as they were printed so they were published. Elaborate, indeed!" Even the author of "The Borough," a man who but for his genius might have been a druggist's assistant, was not above this paltry affectation. "How odd," he says to Sir Walter Scott, "you wrote your 'Lay' to buy a new horse for the Volunteer Cavalry, and I wrote 'The Village' to send my sons to college." Even journalists were not exempt from this foible. Tom Barnes hated to hear the *Times* spoken of in his presence, and thought it derogatory to his character as a gentleman to be known as the Editor of the first newspaper in Europe. We have, thank Heaven, outgrown this silliness. Literature is now a profession. Authors are artists, and wish themselves to be thought artists. Style is a study; and the most popular of our men of letters

cultivate the art of expression as assiduously as French critics. Here and there, perhaps, you may still find men who despise style, men who throw out their ideas as a hodman turns out bricks, and allow them to settle themselves by the law of gravitation. But as a rule the men who are now in the foremost ranks of literature and science—Kinglake, Froude, Ruskin, Newman, Lewes, Lytton, Huxley, Stuart Mill—are hardly less distinguished by their power of expression, than by their power of thought.

And at the head of these authors by profession, stands Thomas Babington Macaulay, the most brilliant, and, excepting Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, the most popular man of letters this generation has known. He stands in the front rank of what may be called the second generation of Edinburgh Reviewers, in the front rank, that is, of the race of professional and semi-professional men of letters by whose pens the *Edinburgh Review* was transformed from a mere journal of slap-dash criticism and political pasquinades, into an organ of brilliant speculation, of original thought, and of polished writing. He was a recruit of Sydney Smith's. The troop of Chancery barristers, University professors, College tutors, and Yorkshire vicars, who constituted the original band of Edinburgh Reviewers, fell off one by one; and, concurrently with the increase of his practice at the bar, Jeffrey thus found the work of the *Review* falling more and

more every year upon his own shoulders. He loved the *Review*, and he loved criticism, but he loved his profession and the honours of that profession more than either; and in his correspondence we find him pressing Smith, and Allen, and Horner, either to send more of their own articles, or to beat up fresh recruits. "I am sick of furbishing up other men's rubbish. I have only been able to write a single article in the present number of the *Review*. All the time I have had to spare has been occupied in vamping up the materials of stray contributors." "Can you not lay your hands on some clever young men who would write for us? The original supporters of the work are getting old, and others too busy or too stupid to go on comfortably; and in Edinburgh the young men are mostly Tories." These sort of sentences crop up repeatedly in his letters. He thought as much of "a clever young man" as Frederick of Prussia thought of a tall grenadier. It was the most acceptable present that you could offer him; and of all the clever young men that were picked up in this way in Westminster Hall, in Lincoln's Inn, at Charles Lamb's supper parties in his smoky chambers in the Temple, and in the gilded saloons of Holland House, none apparently gave Jeffrey more gratification than Macaulay. To listen to "a young fellow named Follet" arguing a point of law, is said to have been the highest pleasure of Lord Ellenborough's old age, and to look through

the MS. of Macaulay's articles, to correct his proofs, and to hear him read a page or two of his history in MS., and to talk it over after a quiet breakfast in the Albany, formed the pleasantest of the critical labours of Francis Jeffrey during the closing years of his life. He revised every page of the first two volumes of the "History," punctuating the proofs at seventy-four with all the skill and care of Messrs. Longman's own reader. This task of punctuating proofs was one that Jeffrey particularly plumed himself upon. "This," he used to say playfully, "is the department of literature in which I feel that I most excel, and on which, therefore, I am most willing now to stake my reputation."

And Sydney Smith was as proud of his recruit as Jeffrey was of his contributor. "Yes," he said, speaking of him years after, when Macaulay's articles in the *Review* were the talk of half the dinner tables at the West End, and when Macaulay was the most brilliant of his own rivals as a diner-out—"Yes, I take great credit to myself. I always prophesied his greatness from the first moment I saw him, then a very young and unknown man on the Northern Circuit. There are no limits to his knowledge, on small subjects as well as great. He is like a book in breeches." And no one, I presume, will deny Sydney Smith all the credit that he claims on this account, for the contributions of his recruit renewed the youth of the *Edinburgh Review*; and it

is no exaggeration, I believe, to add that the Vicar of Foxton changed the whole current of Macaulay's thought, and fixed his mind upon literature as the profession of his life, when he sent his card to Jeffrey as that of a clever young man whose pen might be turned to good account in the pages of the buff and blue.

Till then the bent of Macaulay's mind had been to the law, with a seat in the House of Commons and the Great Seal in the future; and perhaps no man ever possessed higher qualifications for success at the Bar. This was the opinion of Dr. Peacock, a man who had known most of the distinguished lawyers then to be found in Westminster Hall, Alderson, Park, and Pollock; and all that Brougham thought "old Zackary's son" needed to ensure the reversion of the patent of the Lord Chief Justice, or of the woolsack, was to read Demosthenes, to get Dante by heart, and to go through two or three years' drudgery in an attorney's office. Macaulay had distinguished himself at Cambridge by his plodding industry, and by his brilliant and fascinating eloquence. The ornate and glowing rhetoric that afterwards carried the House of Commons off its feet, placed the young Trinity Commoner, even as an undergraduate, at the head of the rhetoricians of the Union; and the tradition is still cherished how the rooms were crowded when it was known that Macaulay was to take part

in one of the debates, how the undergraduates were pushed aside by the Dons, how Masters of Arts trooped in by the dozen, and how that incarnation of college discipline, Dr. Wood, the master of St. John's, threw aside his *Calculus*, and strolled into the rooms with a week's beard on his chin, to sit for an hour with his mouth wide open, and listen to Macaulay pouring forth his torrents of polished rhapsody with the vehemence and passion of a Greek sophist reciting the Shield of Achilles from the *Iliad*. Outside the walls of the Union, however, the brilliant declaimer was known as the most hard-working of students. He won the Chancellor's prize for English verse in his first year, and in his contest for the Craven Scholarship, a contest turning upon the abstrusest points of grammar, upon a close acquaintance with Latin and Greek idioms, and upon composition in these tongues, he carried off the prize against men who were pre-eminently distinguished by their classical acquirements, and by these almost alone, against men like George Long, to whom King's College owes its greatness as a seat of learning, and Henry Malden, afterwards Professor of Greek at University College. Uniting these powers of close and persistent industry in grappling with the mystery of particles and irregular verbs, with a memory like an encyclopædia, with keen powers of analysis, and with all but the highest gifts of elo-

quence, Thomas Babington Macaulay seemed marked out by nature as the rival of the most accomplished and powerful advocates in Westminster Hall.

But his heart was not in the Law. His temper was short and imperious. He soon lost his coolness under a rebuff. He had little taste for the attorney's work of the Courts, for the short scuffling fence of cross-examination, and for that higgling over petty points of law, where reason and authority are alike against you, which constitutes the staple work at *Nisi Prius*. Perhaps the two or three years' office drudgery which Brougham suggested might, like Maule's pot of porter, have brought Macaulay down to the level of the Barons of the Exchequer. But his literary instincts were too strong within him; and when the ivory gates of the *Edinburgh Review* were once opened to him, he threw away his "Term Reports," "Chitty's Practice," and his brief-bag, and sat down at his desk, partly in the spirit of a devotee, and partly in the spirit of a hard-headed man of business, who, having set his hand to the plough, has no thought of looking back. Intending to live by literature, Macaulay made up his mind to make literature pay; and taking up his pen, with a rival like Sir Walter Scott still at his desk, it was only possible for an essayist with Macaulay's historical tastes to make literature pay by doing for history what the Ariosto of the North had done for romance. And this is what Macaulay did. He

was a cross between Francis Jeffery and Sir Walter Scott, combining the keen critical powers of the Reviewer with the dashing and picturesque style of the Romancist.

Possessing all Macaulay's contributions, as we do, in a handful with his Ballads and his History, able to sit down and read them through at our leisure in a lump, and what is more, to read them through when they have lost much of the freshness of their virgin charm, we are hardly, perhaps, in a position to do full justice either to the writer or to the taste of the generation by whom his articles and ballads were first read. Taking them up as we do now, we are apt to look at them perhaps a trifle too critically, and reading two or three of the Essays through at a sitting, we are able to pull them to pieces, to look into the mechanism of their style, to find out its tricks, and to play with the wand of the conjuror ourselves at our leisure. And brought to a test of this sort, tried by the standard of Greek-like simplicity and directness which is now held to represent the highest artistic beauty in style, all Macaulay's faults are distinguishable at a glance; for the characteristic marks of the mannerist are to be traced in every line. You may tell Macaulay's style in an instant. He has but one style in poetry or in prose, and that style is as strongly marked by its faults as it is by its excellences. It is the style of a man in a hurry, the style of a man of keen intellect, of imperious temper, of

diversified culture, of a master of terse and picturesque English. But it lacks repose. It is too garish. It is the style of a man who knows or cares nothing about the art of intermingling light and shade. This is its weakest point. There is no shade in Macaulay. He never uses neutral tints. He puts no atmosphere into his pictures. They are all like Chinese drawings—coloured. There is not a spark of poetry in one of them; and they are all drawn upon the same rules of art. Macaulay had but one pattern to work from, and that pattern he wrought like a Spitalfield's weaver at his loom, turning out piece after piece with exactly the same web and woof, from the day when, as a B.A. in his college rooms at Trinity, he took up his pen as one of the raw recruits of *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* to sketch Dante, standing amidst his own smiling and radiant spirits, with a scowl of unutterable misery upon his brow and a curl of bitter disdain on his lips—Petrarch, with his laurel crown, standing in the Capitol—Cæsar, strolling with a fashionable stagger in the Forum, with his gown waving in loose folds, and his long dark curls steaming with odours — till that dark December afternoon when, in the full maturity of his splendid powers, he sat down at his desk in his study at Holly Lodge, to put the finishing touches to his picture of "the asthmatic skeleton who covered the slow retreat of England at Landen," by sketching him upon his death-bed in Kensington Palace,

whispering his last words into the ear of Bentinck, with Burnet and Tenison kneeling at his bedside. Macaulay's work, such as it is, was of the highest kind. But it was, in contradistinction to that of a man like De Quincey, what the work of a handloom weaver in Yorkshire is to that of an Indian needlewoman in the vale of Cashmere. He had but one pattern, a machine pattern, and that pattern was apt now and then to be a little tawdry. But when you have said this, you have said all. In the two cardinal points of style—in what De Quincey calls the art of brightening the intelligibility of a subject which is obscure to the understanding, and in the art of regenerating the normal power and impressiveness of a subject which has become dormant to the sensibilities—no man has surpassed Macaulay. And this was exactly the sort of style that Jeffrey wanted. It was emphatically a "taking style." You can read Macaulay when you can read nothing else. All his ideas are intelligible. All his sentences are as vivid as a ray of coloured light. When he is narrating anything he is dashing and picturesque to a degree which no other writer of English, except Scott, has ever attained; and as a critic he has had few rivals in keenness, in brilliancy, and in logical power. His statement of a case is often stronger than most men's arguments; and though he had not a spark of wit in his nature, he has the art of putting things in a way which frequently produces all the effects of the

brightest wit. He flashes such a succession of pictures and images upon your mind, and there is so much dash and vivacity in his style—so much "go" —that no one taking up his articles fresh from the press in the old buff and blue, ever thought of pausing till he had got to the end, any more than one thinks of pausing when travelling by express through a rich and diversified piece of country where you take in the whole scene at a glance, and where each scene is complete in itself, here a bit of water, there a woodland scene, with mountain and fell in the background. His glowing description and his sparkling criticism, his freshness and vigour, affect you when you open his volumes for the first time like magic; and recollecting the sensation which his articles produced when they were originally published—how eagerly they were scanned, how their epigrams, their antithetical forms and their picturesque illustrations, were caught up and reproduced in the House of Commons, in the newspapers, and in the conversation of every dinner-table — one can easily understand how John Murray, in a fit of generous rivalry, opened his heart to offer the copyright of "Childe Harold" to "old Zackary's son" to quit the *Edinburgh* and write for the *Quarterly*. These articles of Macaulay carried Constable's *Review* everywhere, and placed their author at once in the highest ranks of literature and society. "You must study Macaulay when you come to town," says

Sydney Smith, writing to a friend in the country. "He is incomparably the first lion in the metropolis; that is, he writes, talks, and speaks better than any man in England." And this was only a reflection of the general opinion. Jeffrey thought his cleverness marvellous, Gifford eulogised the versification of his "Ode on the Deliverance of Venice from the Turks" as equal to Milman's best lines in its lofty harmony. Tom Moore met him at breakfast at Rogers's with Lord John Russell, Campbell and Luttrell, and pronounced him offhand "one of the most remarkable men of the day." "Macaulay," he says, noting down the pith of the conversation in his diary, "gave us an account of the Monothelite controversy, as revived at present among some of the fanatics of the day. In the course of conversation, Campbell quoted a line,—

'Ye diners out from whom we guard our spoons,'

and looking over at me said significantly, 'You ought to know that line.' I pleaded not guilty; upon which he said, 'It is in a poem that appeared in the *Times*, which everyone attributes to you.' But I again declared that I did not even remember it. Macaulay then broke silence, and said, to our general surprise, 'That is mine;' on which we all expressed a wish to have it recalled to our memories, and he repeated the whole of it. I then remembered having been much struck with it at the time, and

said that there was another squib still better, on the subject of William Bankes's candidateship for Cambridge, which so amused me when it appeared, and showed such power in that style of composition, that I wrote up to Barnes about it, and advised him by all means to secure that hand as an ally. 'That was mine also,' said Macaulay, thus discovering to us a new power, in addition to that varied store of talent which we had already known him to possess." Nor was this all. Tory and Whig vied to strew his path with roses. Lord Lyndhurst gave him a handsome sinecure in the Court of Chancery. Holland House threw open its portals to him. The Marquis of Lansdowne brought him into Parliament for the Borough of Calne, and in the House of Commons, as everywhere else, in the *Times*, in the *Edinburgh Review*, at Rogers's breakfast table and in Lady Holland's drawing-room, the flash and sparkle of his style swept everything before him.

Perhaps there is no assembly in the world where mere intellectual cleverness is thought less of than in the House of Commons. In what Mr. Bright is in the habit of calling the dark ages before '32, it was enough for a man to make a racy rattling speech in defence of the Church or the Crown, or to try his hand at seditious harangues upon rotten boroughs or Test and Corporation Acts, to force himself into the foremost ranks of his party either as a Tory or a Liberal; for the English Government under our old

Parliamentary system was one of the rudest oligarchies that ever held the destinies of a State in its hands. Under the rule of this oligarchy all the highest offices in the State were handed down from generation to generation as part and parcel of the patrimony of a select circle of the Peerage. The Pelhams passed on their seals and white staves, their stars and garters and sinecures, with their oaks and elms, their pictures and jewels, by a sort of Parliamentary entail. There was but one check upon these men of broad acres in the exercise of their power; and that was the check which men of metal, men of genius, and men of eloquence could bring to bear upon them in the House of Commons through the representation of what was called the free boroughs, through the representation, that is, of those constituencies which by some hocus-pocus of the franchise still retained the power of selling themselves in detail to the highest bidder instead of allowing themselves to be sold in a lump by a patron. It was corruption checked by corruption. But in order to keep this system from stinking in the nostrils of the people, it was necessary for the Borough proprietors to buy up intellect as well as votes. In this way all the most active and energetic spirits of the Universities were pressed into the service of the Whigs or Tories, used and thrown aside with a pension or a ribbon. Now and then, as in the case of Pitt, these men took the bit between their teeth, and asserted

the sovereignty of genius and eloquence in the face of all the Borough Proprietors within the four seas. But these instances were very rare. As a rule the men of genius and eloquence were nothing more than Parliamentary puppets. The real power lay in the hands of men like the Duke of Newcastle; and these men were generally too busy in keeping their votes together to think of anything else. "Cape Breton an island! You don't mean to say so. Show it to me on the map. So it is. My dear sir, you always bring us good news. I must go and tell the king that Cape Breton is an island." This is one of the hundred and fifty anecdotes that are told to illustrate the ignorance of one of the most powerful of English ministers. And the Duke of Newcastle was a fair specimen of his order, the aristocratic Borough Proprietor. Sir Robert Walpole may be taken as a fair specimen of another class. He and George the Second, it is said, governed England between them by bad Latin. Walpole's literary accomplishments were lower even than those of Lord Castlereagh. "His literature consisted of a scrap or two of Horace and an anecdote or two from the end of the dictionary. His knowledge of history was so limited that in the great debate on the Excise Bill he was forced to ask Attorney-General Yorke who Empson and Dudley were." The men of eloquence and of genius were not quite so bad as this; but they were very little better. Pitt, as George the Third used to say,

knew nothing of Vattel. The only history of England that he had read, if we are to take his own word, was Shakespeare. But all that any man then needed to rise to the highest position in the ministerial ranks was the single gift of eloquence. Possessing this he possessed everything. It was the "Open sesame" to every office in the Government. Fox led the opposition without understanding a single principle of political economy; and if Sheridan could have mastered the rule of three he might have been Chancellor of the Exchequer. Eloquence made Brougham Lord Chancellor, with less knowledge of the rules of equity than a taxing-master in Chancery. Eloquence made Sheil President of the Board of Trade, without having read ten lines of Adam Smith or knowing anything of the theory of exchanges; and the story runs that a distinguished member of the House of Commons upon receiving his appointment even a few years ago as Secretary for the Colonies called a cab and drove off to Wyld's globe in Leicester Square to find out where the colonies were. Eloquence was the only gift that this race of statesmen possessed in a pre-eminent degree; but in the days of Pitt and Fox and Sheridan this single gift was the passport to the highest offices of the State. Eloquence, of course, will never lose its charm; and in the House of Commons, as everywhere else, the man who can put his thoughts into terse and vivid forms will always find willing listeners. But except when allied with information,

experience, and high personal character, the richest and most diversified eloquence will never again be what it has been in the State.

Government now takes rank among the sciences, and politicians are forming themselves into a sort of professional class. Most of the men who are now to be found in the front ranks of the Conservative and Liberal parties are men who have made the arts of Parliamentary management and statecraft the business of their lives; and this will be the case more and more in the future. One of the most accomplished and persuasive speakers at present to be found in the Parliamentary ranks was pooh-poohed a year or two ago by Mr. Disraeli as a silvered mediocrity, a mere manufacturer of phrases; and while scores of these accomplished and persuasive speakers are sitting on the back benches or below the gangway, men who can hardly put their sentences together in logical order, but who possess the special experience and information that these silvered mediocrities lack, take their seat on the Treasury Bench as Secretaries of State.

When Macaulay first appeared in Parliament, the House of Commons had not acquired that intensely practical tone of thought which characterises it at present. The shades of Fox, Burke, Plunkett, and Grattan still lingered about the Speaker's chair; and Macaulay's style of oratory, with its glitter and its antithesis, with its picturesque forms of expression,

and its wealth of historical illustration, revived the fading recollections of that polished and epigrammatic eloquence which had been but faintly kept alive through the dullest years of our Parliamentary history by the genius and culture of Canning. It was a new sensation to hear the most brilliant of Edinburgh Reviewers repeating his articles from the back benches of the Ministerial ranks; and almost at a bound the author of the Political Georgics and of the articles on Milton and Machiavelli leapt into the foremost rank of Parliamentary orators. His speech on India was pronounced by the Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, the best he had ever heard. Sir James Mackintosh spoke in still higher terms of the speeches on Parliamentary Reform. They were, he said, the finest ever spoken in Parliament. Of course this, like most of Sir James Mackintosh's eulogy, was pitched in too high a key. But Jeffrey hit the mark with his usual critical precision in pronouncing them superior to everything except Mr. Stanley's, and inferior to his only in the style of their delivery. In closeness, fire, and vigour they surpass all the rest of the speeches on the Reform Bill to be found in the pages of "Hansard."

But every contemporary critic agrees in saying that it was very different to read these speeches in the *Times* and to listen to them in the gallery of the House of Commons. All you heard there was a harsh, shrill voice, a voice without a note of music in

it, pouring out a torrent of words without the slightest variation of tone, without the slightest attempt at emphasis, without a single pause of any description. All you thought of in listening to Macaulay, said a keen critic at the time, was an express train, which did not even stop at the chief stations.

And if there was little in his action or his voice to recommend Macaulay's speeches, there was still less in his personal appearance. What you saw when you fixed your eye upon the owner of that shrill, monotonous voice, was a short, thickset man, as stiff as an automaton, with a head and shoulders like those of a cod fish, standing with his left hand thrown behind his back, and using his right now and then without any particular grace to emphasise a sentence by a series of short, sharp jerks. All the expression of his face lay in his eye. This was of a deep blue, and distinguished, like Jeffrey's, by its keenness and brilliancy. His hair was of a beautiful jet black. Yet as you listened to this automaton, with its glittering blue eyes, its swarthy complexion, and its rounded features, chiselled apparently in miniature, pouring forth its stream of felicitous sentences, the stiff and boyish form disappeared by magic, even the shrill voice ceased to grate on the ear, as you followed its masterly and symmetrical discussion of the question, so ingenious, so thoughtful, so rich in fine illustrations, that you held your breath to listen—to the excogitations of the moment? Hardly; for

though Macaulay spoke without the slightest assistance from notes or MS. of any kind, no one could listen to him for ten sentences together and doubt that every word of his speech had been conned over in his chambers in Lincoln's Inn or the Albany, as carefully as if it were intended for the keen eye of Jeffrey in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*.

This was the fact; for Macaulay never trusted his success to fortune. All his speeches, or at least the principal parts, were, like Lord Brougham's, written out beforehand, learned by rote, and then poured forth in the House of Commons in the style of a Pundit repeating the Vedas, without the omission of a particle, and at the same time apparently without anything but the very slightest appreciation of their meaning. It was generally known beforehand when Macaulay meant to speak. He was to be seen straggling along the Strand and through Whitehall on his way from the Temple to Palace Yard, with his eyes fixed upon the pavement and muttering his speech in soliloquy, or seated on the second or third row of the Ministerial benches with his eyes shut and his arms folded. He watched his opportunity, and the instant the Speaker's eye fell upon him, sprang to his feet and dashed into the thick of the question under discussion without the slightest hesitation or circumlocution; for in his speaking as in his writing, Macaulay gave you the impression of a man in too great a hurry to think of anything but the busi-

ness in hand. On, on he sped, as one of his critics in the Gallery represents him, and as every one who knows his style can picture him, never stopping for words, never stopping for thoughts, never halting for an instant even to take breath, his intellect gathering new vigour as he went on, hauling the subject after him, and all its possible attributes and illustrations, with the strength of a giant, leaving a line of light on the pathway his mind had trod, till, unexhausted and apparently inexhaustible, he brought his speech to a close by a peroration so highly sustained in its declamatory power, so abounding in illustration, so admirably framed to crown and clench the whole oration, that surprise, if it had even begun to wear off, kindled anew, and the hearer was left utterly prostrate and powerless by the whirlwind of ideas and emotions that had swept over him. There are but two speeches of Macaulay's that make any pretension to be impromptus—that in reply to Orator Hunt on the Anatomy Bill, and that on the War with China; and it does not require the eye of a critic to trace out considerable passages even in these that had been jotted down at his desk and turned over in his memory in the course of his walk from Lincoln's Inn to the House. This habit of preparing his speeches grew upon him so strongly in the course of years, that it was a positive pain and embarrassment to him at last to be called upon to speak even a dozen sentences offhand.

You may trace these marks of labour, I think, in all his speeches and in all his essays. Glowing as they do with life—the work, apparently of a man whose imagination bred thoughts and illustrations with poetic profusion, who never knew what it was to pause for an apt or picturesque expression—all his writings were, nevertheless, the work of a deeply meditating mind and of a laborious pen. With a group of friends like those he met at Lansdowne House, at Bowood, or in St. James's Place, with Tom Moore and Dean Milman or Campbell at his side, Macaulay never ceased to talk till he had reduced everyone else to silence, unless Sidney Smith or Jeffrey happened to be within earshot. He was the tyrant of the table and rarely tolerated any talk but his own. Jeffrey used to quiz him on one of his achievements in this line at Sir J. Stephen's, where he first silenced his host by a disquisition on the Monothelite controversy, afterwards sent Lord Monteagle to sleep with an account of the classical acquirements of Lady Jane Grey and her sisters, and spent the rest of the evening very pleasantly in pure soliloquy. And this is borne out to the letter by Sydney Smith's suggestive compliment to his rival upon his occasional flashes of silence after his return from India. "I do not believe," Sydney Smith used to say, "that Macaulay ever did hear my voice. Sometimes when I have told a good story, I have thought to myself, 'Poor Macaulay! he will be very

sorry some day to have missed hearing that.'" His thoughts were like flashes of lightning. "While other men were thinking what to say and how to say it, Macaulay said it all and a great deal more." His memory was prodigious, surpassing even that of Sir James Mackintosh, and his powers of illustration were equal to those of Jeffrey. Teeming with thought, criticism, apt quotation and racy illustrations, and endowed with high animal spirits, a quick and pugnacious temper, Macaulay sat still only when compelled by sheer force. A professional talker or a rival he put down in an instant, without the slightest hesitation or compunction, and trampled upon him into the bargain if he showed signs of resistance. "Of Macaulay's range of knowledge," says Tom Moore, "anything may be believed, so wonderful is his memory;" and as an illustration he tells us how, at a breakfast at Monckton Milnes', Macaulay astonished and amused the guests by his familiarity with the old Irish slang ballads, "The night before Larry was stretched," &c., many of which he ran off as glibly as his own Political Georgics. "He certainly," says Moore, "obeys most wonderfully Eloisa's injunction, 'Do all things but forget.'" The hearer often longed for Macaulay's memory, said one who had often sat by his side, to carry off what he heard in a single morning, in an after-dinner colloquy, or in a few hours at a country-house.

And yet with all the enthusiasm that Macaulay

inspired by his talk, no one has made any but the meagrest attempts to preserve a few scraps of it. "Anecdote, touches of character, drollery, fun, excellent stories excellently told," is all that Dean Milman takes the trouble to say of it; and Moore gives us very little more. "He seized upon an idea," Mrs. Beecher Stowe says, "and turned it inside out and shook it on all sides, just as one might play with the lustres of a chandelier, to see them glisten." This was his forte; and with the aid of a memory that never failed, and with powers of illustration that were all but overwhelming, Macaulay, in his conversation, as in his speeches and his writings, surprised and charmed everybody by his sparkling and epigrammatic eloquence.

What part of this was the inspiration of the moment, as in the case of Sydney Smith's sallies, and what part the result of preparation, as in the case of Sheridan, it is, I suppose, impossible now to say, unless Sir Charles Trevelyan or Mr. Ellis will rifle his desk and publish his memoranda for our information. Even without this, however, we know enough of his *secrets d'atelier* to know that at his desk the most profuse and brilliant of table talkers was as laborious and painstaking an artist as ever took up a pen to earn a guinea by a political squib, or an ode in a newspaper. Take up a page of Jeffrey or Sydney Smith, and you can hardly distinguish it from their hastiest notes of chit-chat and criticism,

upon the topics of the day; for pen in hand these men wrote exactly as they talked, and in their most offhand conversation you may trace the critical acuteness and the wild rollicking wit that marked all their writings. But Macaulay no sooner takes up his pen than he becomes as stiff and stilted as literary pipeclay and buckram can make him. Where he has been easy and flowing, he is epigrammatic and antithetical. Illustration is piled on illustration till the plain thought is often lost in a sort of Rosamond's bower. To say that the ladies of Elizabeth's Court knew Latin and Greek, that those of our own day know French, German, and Italian, and that the bevy of buxom maids who fluttered about the galleries of Whitehall in Charles the Second's time possessed the accomplishments of neither, is very simple. And yet this is the sum and substance of Macaulay's description of the state of female education at the Restoration, when the literary stores of the Lady of the Manor and her daughters consisted generally of nothing more than a Prayer-book and a receipt-book. "At an earlier period they had studied the masterpieces of ancient genius. In the present day they seldom bestow much attention on the dead languages; but they are familiar with the tongue of Pascal and Molière, with the tongue of Dante and Tasso, with the tongue of Goethe and Schiller; nor is there any purer or more graceful English than that which accomplished women now

speak and write. But during the latter part of the seventeenth century, the culture of the female mind seems to have been almost entirely neglected. If a damsel had the least smattering of literature she was regarded as a prodigy. Ladies highly born, highly bred, and naturally quick-witted, were unable to write a line in their mother-tongue without solecisms and faults of spelling such as a charity girl would now be ashamed to commit; his was Macaulay. He must be vivid. He must be striking. He must be picturesque. Every sentence must be revised, and pruned, and burnished, till it has attained the highest gloss that a set of words in that form can bear. You never catch Macaulay in his dressing-gown and slippers. He is always in full dress, with his sword, and his bag, and wig. You never detect his thought in the process of making. He never permits you to see a page of his writing in the form in which it has left his desk. It must be all copied out in a fine Roman hand before it meets your eye. What he offers you is the work complete. And in this complete form it has but one fault. It wants a touch or two of Nature. Of its kind, of course, it is perfect; and perhaps no man ever wrote with more precision at once of thought and expression than the most brilliant of the Edinburgh Reviewers. I do not believe it is possible to find a single loose or slipshod sentence in all his writings. Perhaps now and then you may detect him using an *ad captandum* illustration, as in the case of

his comparison of Mourad Bey and Napoleon, and his description of the astonishment of the Mamelukes when they found a man who was scarcely five feet high, and rode like a butcher, the greatest soldier in Europe. But, as a rule, every suggestion, even in an illustration of this kind, is as authentic as one of Hallam's notes; for Macaulay, with all his powers of imagination, preferred to take even his most trifling touches of portraiture from the personal recollections of contemporary critics to developing them, like the novelist, from the depths of his own consciousness. He had a keen eye for the slightest hint that could be turned to account in sketching the portrait of a man, and we have only to turn to his essays at random, to Addison, Chatham, Clive, Hastings, or Machiavelli, to see at a glance how thoroughly he read up his subject, how he ransacked the top shelves of old libraries for political squibs, for old diaries, and volumes of correspondence, for folios that might appal even the heart of the stoutest commentator, and for novels and poems that had been sent to the trunkmaker by their own authors as soon as they had passed through the press, to pick up hints that might enable him to form a more vivid and picturesque conception of a scene, or to get closer to a great statesman, a soldier, or a man of letters; any hints from which he could gather the chit-chat of Lady Killigrew and her sisters as they sat in the lonely oriel over their embroidery, while the horns

were sounding and the dogs in full cry; or how Queen Anne's maids of honour killed their time a hundred and eighty years ago, how far their minds were cultivated, what were their favourite studies, what degree of liberty was allowed to them, what use they made of their liberty, what accomplishments they most valued in men, and what proofs of tenderness delicacy permitted them to give to favoured suitors; or any suggestions by which he could add a fresh touch to his portraits of Walpole, Addison, Clive, Hastings, or Temple. All his portraits are drawn from the life, and stand out upon his canvas like Holbein's portrait of Wentworth. You know the men in an instant, by the flash of their eye, by the scowl upon their brow, by the music or the thunder of their voice, by the swagger of their gait; for instead of the shadows of the Parliamentary History, or the State Trials, or of filial biographies, Macaulay presents us with the men themselves, with all their personal traits, with all their tricks and perversities of manner, with all their faults and foibles; presents them to us as they were known to their contemporaries, their rivals, their opponents, their friends, and their enemies; as they were known and talked of in the galleries of Whitehall and in the garrets of Grub Street; as they were quizzed in the coffee-houses by beaux, and wits, and by politicians in the corridors of the Houses of Parliament; as they looked when dressed for a *fête* at the

Ranelagh Gardens; and as they appeared at their own dinner tables, with half-a-dozen of their bosom companions. None of Macaulay's men and women are plaster of Paris busts. They are all flesh and blood. You can take off your hat to them, chat with them about the politics and scandal of the day, look through their portfolios, their diaries, and their letters; for Macaulay puts us hand-in-glove with all of them at once, takes us through their libraries, their picture galleries, their parks and flower-beds; tells us all the tittle-tattle of the clubs about them, what is false and what is real in their get up. "The difference between one man and another," he says frankly, "is by no means so great as the superstitious crowd supposes," and with this hint he introduces you to all his heroes in their undress, talks about them as he might talk of Lord Grey, Lord Russell, Sir Robert Peel, or any of the rest of the men whom he has been jostling in the lobby of the House of Commons, and chatting with in the smoking room of his Club for ten years. He is on an equality with the highest of them, knows every trifle about them, all their opinions, all their gestures, all their tones; and talks about them to you in the frank and offhand style of the House of Commons, instead of the hard and high tone of the cloister.

To the tastes and industry of an antiquarian, Macaulay added an imagination as vivid and realistic as Sir Walter Scott's, and some of the most

striking bits of portraiture and description to be found in his writings are obviously the result of an amount of reading and research that would have broken the heart of an ordinary bookworm. Look at his sketch of the Court of Charles the Second,—at Charles strolling in the Park with his spaniels, while the dew is still fresh upon the grass, feeding his ducks, chatting with his boon companions about his Ministers, and touching off their tempers and traits in a telling epigram; or hunting a moth with the ladies of his seraglio, when the Dutch Admiral is burning English ships at Chatham. Or take his account of the Western rebellion. What a life-like piece of writing that is! It has all the dramatic interest of a romance. You cannot read it without a flush of excitement. It is like a chapter from *Ivanhoe*. And all this was written upon the spot; for when Macaulay was at work upon this part of his history, he passed two or three weeks in a cottage on the Somerset marshes, spending his mornings in exploring every scene, with his map in his hand, and his notes in his pocket-book, talking to the peasantry and collecting all the traditions which still linger in the atmosphere of the moors, and his evenings in the parlour of the little roadside inn, re-touching his sketch with the scene still in his eye. And this had been his habit all his life. It is a habit which is to be traced as distinctly in his Essays as in his History; for Macaulay never scamped his work, never

assumed anything that could not be put to the test, never wrote from imagination when he could write from observation, and never in criticising a book or a theory, allowed himself to be seduced into accepting a statement that could be put to the proof by a little industry or enquiry. A striking instance of this occurs in his Essays on Sadler's *Theory of Population.* Sadler tries to eke out his argument against Malthus's assertion, that the law of increase in population is a geometrical law, by citing the case of the Peerage. "The Peers," he says, "are a marrying class. They are a healthy class. And yet they are a sterile class, must be a sterile class, or how does it happen that Peerages die out at the rate that they do?" "Is this the proper way of ascertaining the point?" asks Macaulay, in his imperious tone. "Mr. Sadler's right course would have been to count the marriages, and the number of births in the Peerage. This he has not done; *but we have done it;*" and there are the results of a most laborious analysis of Debrett, the work of three or four long days, all compressed into a page! Dozens of instances of this kind might be cited. And as Macaulay tested an argument like this of Sadler's, he tested all his facts, hunting up every book, or ballad, or tradition to be found upon the matter or of the historical period that he happened to have in hand. Most of his Essays are thus histories in miniature, historiettes, reproducing on a small scale a succession of scenes and a

series of portraits, that might, with a little amplification in the details, be worked up into a volume.

Yet with all his industry, with all his imagination, with all his art, Macaulay is a pauper in thought. Give him a book to tear to pieces, like Gladstone's *Church and State,* Sadler's *Law of Population,* or Croker's edition of Boswell's Johnson, and he dissected it under a microscope. Or give him a hint like that of Barillon's as to Temple's plan for the establishment of a new system of government, or as to the authorship of Junius, and ask him to work it up; and the result is a marvellous specimen of analysis, suggestion, illustration, and luminous statement. But Macaulay originates nothing on his own account. Left alone he was almost helpless. He never travels out of the record, always stops with his guide at the end of the volume. He thought by proxy. But plagiarism with him was one of the fine arts. No man knew better how to turn an appropriated thought to account and to make it his own by a brilliant setting. Take that theory of his in one of his speeches, that all the great works of genius have been produced by men over forty. The original suggestion is Mrs. Barbauld's. But Mrs. Barbauld put it in its barest form. Macaulay illustrates and adorns it as only Macaulay could illustrate and adorn it; and by a dexterous and ingenious use of this theory, he turned half the votes of the House of Commons against Serjeant Talfourd's Copyright Bill.

And what Macaulay did with a suggestion like this of Mrs. Barbauld's, he did with every idea of his own that turned up in his writings. All his own ideas, all his best illustrations, all his striking passages, have a literary history of their own. You can trace the pedigree of every one of them.

Upon what models Macaulay formed his style it is not easy to say with precision. You may trace the influence of many writers in its growth,—of Plautus, of Livy, of Thucydides, of Petrarch, of Dante, of Milton and of Scott. And yet when you come to compare it with the style of these men, you find so much in Macaulay that you find in none of these, taken by themselves, that you are driven to the conclusion that his style, after all, was what it generally is in the case of every man of genius—a development of his own intellectual tendencies. It is emphatically his own; and the style is the man. Take up any of his boyish contributions to *Knight's Magazine* —his paper on the Italian Poets, or that on the Athenian Orators—and you find there the same rapid and picturesque narrative, the same vivid sketches of men and scenes, the same condensation and point that you find in richer and more varied forms in his contributions to the *Edinburgh* and in his History. And there, too, you find almost as conspicuously what Sir George Lewis called the touch of the showman—that girlish affectation of tinsel ornament which offends the eye so frequently, even in his latest writ-

ings. These touches of the showman seem to me to prove that Macaulay's taste, after all, was not as keen and critical as one might have anticipated in so accomplished a scholar and so laborious a workman; for Macaulay never wrote in haste, and revised everything that he wrote with the greatest nicety. His first rough draft was absolutely illegible from erasures and corrections. It was written on official foolscap, with the lines full an inch apart. This, however, formed but the rough outline of the essay. When the keel had thus been laid down, Macaulay began the work of amplification and revision; and when that was complete, you could hardly find space on the page to stick a pin's point. Prescott saw two or three of these pages of the MS. of his History. "You have no conception," he says, "of the amount of labour that one of these sheets of foolscap represent." But this MS. was never sent to the printer. It was copied out by Macaulay in a hand almost as bold and legible as large pica.

Of his habits and hours of work, little is known. When in London, he generally spent most of the morning in the reading-room of the British Museum, and his evenings at his desk. But his favourite hours of work, I believe, were those of the morning, although upon this point he "humoured his disposition," like Gray. If the work palled upon him, he took up his hat and stick and started off for a stroll, generally taking a book in his pocket when in the

country. Plautus was his favourite, and in a note to one of his poems he tells us how he spent many an idle hour rambling on the beach with his book in his hand, turning the Rudens of the Roman poet into what he supposed to be the original Greek. In London he varied this diversion by visiting the book stalls, to pick up rare or original editions of old books, or by strolling through the Seven Dials in search of ballads, and it is said that the idea of writing his Roman ballads struck him when listening to a street singer, chaunting an old English ballad in Whitechapel. He was as fond of these old English ballads as Sir Walter Scott, and spent the whole of one long vacation, it is said, in a stroll through the northern counties collecting a set. But every line of his Roman ballads bears marks of his visit to Italy, and, as a matter of fact, I believe all his illustrations were, like Byron's, drawn from personal observation. When living alone in the Albany, Jeffrey tells us that Macaulay, like Charles Dickens, often threw down his pen at midnight, and strolled out into the silent streets, to walk about for two or three hours, thinking the silence and solitude of a great city favourable to meditation. He generally returned to his desk with a fresh stock of vivid and picturesque thoughts; and a keen eye, in looking through his essays, may, I think, trace many images and illustrations struck out in the course of these rambles. Johnson, in his criticism on Gray, laughed

at this habit of his and Macaulay's of writing only when what Byron called the estro was on. But it is, I suspect, the habit of most men with whom writing is anything more than a mechanical employment. It was the habit of Byron, of Shelley, and of Burns; and it is a habit that is commended by one who understood the artistic temperament in all its moods. "When you begin to tire of your work," says Leslie, "leave off. Otherwise you will probably injure it. You will certainly injure yourself."

I intended to say something of Macaulay as a critic and an historian. But I must close. It was as an Edinburgh Reviewer that the commoner of Trinity College won his spurs in the field of literature; and it is as the most brilliant of Edinburgh Reviewers that he will be best remembered. His History, in itself but a fragment, is for the most part an elaboration of his Essays; and, except as works of art, his speeches have no more value than the first dozen speeches on the Irish Land Bill that you may select from the *Times* blindfolded. The Essays are of their kind superb; and they promise to live as long as the English language. They have influenced the style of English writers more, perhaps, than the writings of any man of our time, except Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens; and, with all their faults, they have not yet lost the charm by which their author won his unexampled popularity thirty years ago.

LORD BYRON.

PERHAPS there is no position in which Lord Byron would have wished less to be sketched than that of a poet at his desk scribbling verses, reading proofs, or quarrelling with his publisher, like a hack, over the price of his thoughts. To be a poet and to be nothing else, was, in his opinion, to be one of the most useless, and therefore one of the most contemptible of men. "If one's years cannot be better employed than in sweating poetry," he said, "a man had better be a ditcher;" and that question of Scott's, when comparing the actions of a man like the Duke of Wellington with the thoughts of a man of letters,—"What do you suppose the Duke thinks of these bits of novels of mine, even if he has ever read them?" was always in one form or another at the tip of Byron's tongue. A son of the Crusades, the author of *Childe Harold* was all his life prouder of his escutcheon, and of the tradition which pictured one of his ancestors, John of Horiston, leading his vassals from Europe to the towers of Askalon, than of the most brilliant and thoughtful of his poems; and it is impossible to look through his correspondence without seeing at a glance that to have died sword in hand storming the fortress of Lepanto, as

one of the heroes of Greece, he would, without a moment's hesitation, have consigned all his rhymes to the flames. He refused at first to accept a guinea for his works; and when the bailiffs were in his house, scattering his household gods around him, and selling even his books, he presented his copyrights to any of his friends who had the courage to ask for them, or would take them as a gift. Yet these despised copyrights are, after all, his best, and indeed his only title-deeds to fame; and it is as a man of letters only that posterity will trouble itself to give a second thought to the poor peer who ended a career of turbulence and vice in the camp of a horde of Greek bandits at Missolonghi.

To be a man of action, and to be a man of action in contradistinction to a man of thought, was the dream which haunted Byron all his life; and but for the *Edinburgh Review* we should probably never have heard of him at all as a poet: for the original bent of his mind was to oratory, and in one of his boyish poems, written at sixteen or seventeen, he breaks out into a rhapsody over the great Parliamentary athletes of his day which shows where he had then set his heart, and where he thought the highest and noblest fame was to be won.

"For the life of a Fox, of a Chatham the death,
What censure, what danger, what woe would I brave?
Their lives did not end when they yielded their breath,
Their glory illumines the gloom of the grave."

Poetry, with Byron, was an afterthought; and the first volume of poems that he sent to the press was published more in a spirit of caprice than of anything else, and with a distinct intimation beforehand to his friends, that in writing it he had "never looked beyond the moment of composition," and that "poetic fame was by no means the *acmé* of his wishes." It was the *Edinburgh Review* that first brought Byron's powers as a poet into full play; and even the best parts of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* were made up of that sort of satire and invective which tells best in a hot reply in the House of Commons, at two o'clock in the morning, at the end of a sharp political debate. This forms the starting point in Byron's history as a poet; and but for this review *The Hours of Idleness* would probably never have been heard of out of the narrow circle at Southwell, and perhaps in two or three London drawing-rooms; Byron would have taken his seat in the House of Lords, broken his mind upon blue books, instead of breaking it upon an Armenian Grammar in a Greek monastery, thundered against Pitt and Castlereagh, attacked rotten boroughs and the Corn Laws, and perhaps in the fulness of time have risen to the position of an Under Secretary of State, and died a year or two ago, like his travelling companion, Mr. Hobhouse, in all the odour of red tape and sealing-wax, as innocent of the sin of rhyme as Black Rod, and the world

would have heard nothing either of *Childe Harold* or *The Corsair*.

Even as it was, *Childe Harold* was published by a fluke. It was not written for publication. It was not intended for publication. All that Byron wrote for publication in the course of his first visit to the East was a paraphrase of Horace's *Art of Poetry*, thinking that it would make a good finish to his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, and form a final proof to the Edinburgh Reviewers that satire, after all, was his forte. This was the work to which he had given almost all his serious thoughts, during his tour through Greece. It was written out aud polished off in the March of 1811, in the Capuchin Convent at Athens, and the MS. handed over to Mr. Dallas for publication, the day Byron arrived in London. Mr. Dallas was in blank dismay, as he tells us, at finding that a pilgrimage of a year to the inspiring lands of the East had produced no richer poetical result than this handful of hints from Horace; and he expressed this surprise to Lord Byron when he met him at breakfast the next morning. "Upon this," Mr. Dallas adds, "Lord Byron told me that he had occasionally written short poems, besides a great many stanzas in Spenser's measure, relative to the countries he had visited. 'They are not worth troubling you with, but you shall have them all with you if you like.' So I came by *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. He took it from a

small trunk, with a number of verses. He said they had been read but by one person—(Mr. Hobhouse, I presume) who had found very little to commend, and much to condemn; that he himself was of this opinion, and he was sure I should be so too. Such, however, as it was, it was at my service; but he was urgent that the *Hints* from Horace should be put in train for publication at once." "You have written one of the most delightful poems I have ever read," said Mr. Dallas, after he had glanced through the MS. in the course of the day. "I have been so fascinated with *Childe Harold* that I have not been able to lay it down." Byron smiled at this incredulously. "It was anything but poetry—it had been condemned by a good critic—had I not myself seen the sentences on the margin of the manuscripts?" But Mr. Dallas refused to be put off with this hasty and haphazard criticism of "a good critic." "I did all I could to raise his opinion of the composition, and I succeeded; but he varied much in his feelings about it, nor was he at his ease until the world decided on its merits. He said again and again that I was going to get him into a scrape with his old enemies, and that none of them would rejoice more than the Edinburgh Reviewers at an opportunity to humble him." It was in this way that the two first cantos of *Childe Harold* saw the light. They were published by Mr. Murray, in February, 1812, after being refused by one of the first publishing firms at the West End, as

English Bards and Scotch Reviewers had been refused in its turn by the first publishing firm in Paternoster Row. The *Hints from Horace* were to Byron's intense disgust suppressed, and with the MS. of this supplement to his satire lying in his desk, he could hardly listen with patience at first, to the applause which greeted the appearance of *Childe Harold* from all quarters.

Horace, persisted Byron, was his masterpiece, and Horace was suppressed. *Childe Harold* was but a trifle, written to kill a few odd hours hanging on his hands in Albania and at Smyrna; and the public were forming the highest conception of his genius from a work which in his heart he was half ashamed of. These sort of complaints crop up all through his correspondence; and they form the key of all Byron's notions of poetry, of his own genius, and of the value of his works. Byron as a poet and Byron as an artist formed one of the most striking and perplexing of antitheses; for it was not only that he despised all the poems which the world read with rapture and admiration, but that he despised the plan upon which these poems were written—their style—their thoughts—and was vexed with himself for writing poems of this description, and compounding with lasting fame as he thought by writing trash to fit in with the whim of the hour. It was not simply a case of perverse affection, like that of Gray for his Latin poems in preference to his English. All lite-

rature is full of cases of this kind. Milton preferred his *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost*. Petrarch wished his fame to rest upon his epic poem *Africa*, pooh-poohing all his sonnets; and perhaps, if the truth were known, Shakespeare preferred his sonnets to *Hamlet* and *Othello*. Tasso thought his masterpiece hardly worth speaking of in comparison with the trifles of his genius; and Gray wished to stake his reputation upon his Latin poems in preference to his *Elegy*. Byron preferred his *Hints from Horace* to everything except, perhaps the *Corsair*. But Byron's preference was not, like that of most of the men I have mentioned, a mere caprice. It arose from a profound conviction that the taste of the age for poetry like that of *Childe Harold* was a false and fleeting taste; and that, like all the rest of his contemporaries, in writing poetry of this sort he was on the wrong tack. The artist in Byron despised the poet. The poet in his turn now and then returned the compliment by sneering at the artist. Byron hardly ever spoke of his own works, when he spoke of them critically, except in the language of depreciation. His genius as a poet was the genius of Wordsworth; but his taste as a critic was the taste of Pope. Pen in hand, he never for a moment, except when translating his *Hints from Horace*, permitted his critical tastes to interfere with the free play of his genius. But these tastes, after all, were more deeply rooted in his nature than his genius.

He never spoke of Wordsworth but with aversion, and he never spoke of Pope but with what most people now think preposterous adulation. He set Pope even above Shakspeare and Milton. "I have always regarded him," he says in a letter to Moore, "as the greatest name in our poetry. The rest are barbarians."

Yet, with all these stiff and starch notions of versification, Byron forgot all about his model, Pope, and his own indignant strictures upon the "atrocious bad taste of the times" and all that, the moment he took up his grey goose quill; when the fit was on, he wrote as it was natural that a man of his bold and passionate genius should write—wrote, that is, in the spirit of Scott and Coleridge and Wordsworth, and resented almost as an insult to his genius any compliments that were paid to his poems as works of art, any suggestion in the way of criticism that seemed to imply that his poems, like Pope's, owed anything of their beauty and finish to the skill or labour of the workman instead of the inspiration of the poet. He hated to be thought a literary workman; and nothing annoyed him more in the criticism of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* than to find his poems spoken of as works of art. He got into a passion with Jeffrey and Gifford for speaking of *Cain* and *Lara* as elaborate. "Elaborate! What do they mean?" he asks in a note to Murray acknowledging a packet of criticisms and compliments. "You know the volume

was written as fast as I could put pen to paper, printed from the *original* manuscripts, and never revised but in the proofs." "Of all the works I have ever written, these," he says in a subsequent letter to Moore, harping on this word elaborate, "are the most carelessly composed, and their faults, whatever they may be, are those of negligence and not of labour;" and their beauties, of course, for this is what Byron is suggesting, the result of inspiration. He is fond of comparing himself (in poetry) to the tiger. "If I miss the first spring," he says, "I go growling back to my jungles. There is no second; I can't correct; I can't, and I won't."

This was his theory, and his practice very closely corresponded with his theory. Most of his works were written in heats, dashed off, that is, at the rate of fifty or sixty stanzas at a sitting over a bottle of Hollands or Burgundy. He is never tired of boasting of this in his correspondence with Moore and Murray. "This is the work of a week, and scribbled *stans pede in uno*," he says, speaking of the *Bride of Abydos*; and in his Diary he explains with more precision that "it was written in four nights to distract his dreams. Were it not thus," he adds, "it had never been composed; and had I not done something at that time I must have gone mad, by eating my own heart." "It wrung my thoughts from reality to imagination—from selfish regrets to vivid recollections—and recalled me to a country replete with

the brightest and darkest, but most lively colours of my memory." The *Corsair* was written in ten days, at the rate, that is, of two hundred lines a day; Pulci he translated at the rate of two octaves a night, "the same allowance as at Venice." *Lara* was written "in the summer of the sovereigns" (1814), "amidst balls and fooleries, when undressing," he says, "after coming home from ball and masquerades;" and *The Vision of Dante*—"the best thing I ever wrote, if it be not unintelligible"—was written at the request of Madame Guiccioli, most of it by the side of her couch, with what that lady calls "his usual facility and rapidity."

It is no part of my business to reconcile the poet with the artist. Perhaps, however, it may be as well to point out that though Byron wrote most of his works under the influence of what is called inspiration, and therefore with remarkable fluency and rapidity, he nursed his genius as carefully as Pope when he was making preparations for any of his works; and with the exception of the *Corsair*, of *Lara*, and of *Cain*, most of these rough sketches were afterwards revised and polished in the keenest spirit of criticism, carefully copied out, and frequently revised and re-revised in the proof. Take the *Bride of Abydos*, for example. In its original form, it was the work of a week—a work, that is, which cost him less time, "although more hours at a time," than anything else he had done; but as it now stands

it is much longer and far more beautiful than when it left the desk of the poet in its first rough manuscript. Moore traced out two hundred fresh lines interpolated in the proof, and, "as usual, among the passages thus added were some of the happiest and most brilliant in the whole poem." The *Corsair*, and the *Corsair* only, I believe, stands as it was originally written. It sprang from his brain perfect, and, taking into account the surpassing beauty of the work, it is, as Moore says, perhaps wholly without a parallel in the history of genius.

What, however, looks like inspiration even in *The Corsair*, may be, after all, only the result of profound thought and meditation, for popularity was the passion of Byron's life, and poetry the only means that he possessed of gratifying his passion. He was hardly ever without a poem on hand, and frequently had hints or sketches for five or six in his desk; and from the moment he fixed his mind upon the title and plan of a piece till the poem was published, it was never out of his thoughts. He was always making additions to it, altering and correcting. You may find traces of this everywhere in his diaries and correspondence. "Wrote down an additional stanza for canto five of *Don Juan*, which I composed in bed this morning," is the first entry in his Diary that strikes me on opening Moore's Life at random; and a few pages further on is a note to Murray: "After

the stanza on Grattan, add the following addenda, which I dreamed of during to-day's siesta."

His muse was always at work. Riding in the woods of Ravenna, or on the sands of the Adriatic; standing, like Lara, by a pillar, and watching the dancers at a ball; listening to the story of the *Prisoner of Chillon*, from the lips of "a corporal as drunk as Blucher, and, to my mind, as great a soldier too;" boating on the Lake of Lucerne, or strolling with Shelley through the vineyards that were once "the bosquet de Julie," with the Heloise before him, Byron was generally surrendering himself up in silence to the pleasant task of moulding his thoughts into shape, avoiding conversation by leaning abstractedly over the side of the boat, or loitering behind his companions, and scrawling figures on the sand with his stick; and when he sat down at the end of the day after dinner, or on his return from balls and masquerades, it was not to think, but to pour out what was in his mind.

To Byron this sort of dreaming was what it is, I suppose, to most men of Byron's genius, an intellectual pleasure of the highest order. Moore calls it a delicious fool's paradise. Coleridge spent half his life in the clouds; and Alfieri tells us that, before his dramatic genius had unfolded itself, he used to pass hours in this state of—what shall I call it?—intellectual somnolence, gazing upon the sea.

Byron's love of solitude took the form of Alfieri's, and the pleasure that he refers to in his lines—

> "To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell,
> To slowly trace the forest's shady scene,
> Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
> And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been;
> To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
> Alone o'er steeps and foaming falls to lean,"—

was a pleasure that he spoke of from personal experience; for it was his habit, when in Greece and Italy, to swim out to sea, to perch himself on the top of a high rock overlooking the sea, and there to pass hour after hour, "in that sort of vague reverie which, however formless and indistinct at the moment, settled afterwards in his pages into those clear, bright pictures which will endure for ever." This love of solitude and meditation characterized him even as a boy at Harrow, where he was in the habit of withdrawing himself from his playmates, and giving himself up to what Keats, I think, calls "the silent session of sweet thoughts," sitting alone upon a tomb in the churchyard. It grew with the growth of his genius, and it was this tendency to meditate, combined with his love of wild and picturesque scenery, that led him first to Greece and then to Italy, and, but for Madame Guiccioli, might have taken him in the end from even Italy and Greece to "the land of Bolivar."

Knowing when and how Byron's works were written, any man who knows Italy or Greece, might,

I believe, trace out most of the spots where Byron spent these leisure hours; for his pictures of scenery, even when only touched off by two or three dashes of the pen, are as vivid and as true to nature as photographs. *Manfred* is a chart to the Bernese Alps; and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is, to my thinking, quite as interesting and suggestive a guide-book to the tourist who wishes to see all that is worth seeing in Europe, apart from the people and the theatres, as Murray's *Handbook*.

Byron's sketches of scenery are unrivalled. They stand alone; and their terseness, vigour, and beauty illustrate the strength, the flexibility, and the varied hues of the English tongue more vividly than any other writings that I know in our language. What without his travels in Greece, in the Alps, and in Italy, Byron might have been as a poet, it is, of course, impossible to say, because it is impossible to tell what a mind like Byron's, thrown back upon itself, might dare, and daring accomplish. But taking his works as they stand, comparing *Sardanapalus* with *Don Juan*, and *Cain* with *Manfred*, it is hard to picture Byron as a great poet, hardly indeed as a poet at all, without his travels; for Byron only really possessed one power in anything like an eminent degree, and that was his power of description. Of constructive genius he had not a spark. All he knew of the drama was through the Greek, and all his attempts to imitate his Greek models are,

to speak mildly, failures. He tried his hand at a novel, after reading German ghost stories for a week with Mr. and Mrs. Shelley, and agreed with them to write something after the same style. He put together a skeleton; but he never got beyond the skeleton; and if Polidore's story is, as it is said to be, founded on Byron's sketch, Mrs. Shelley might well have hesitated to risk her reputation as an authoress by publishing *Frankenstein* between the covers of Byron's novel.

The plan, and even most of the ideas of Byron's works, were, to use an ugly word to express a commonplace fact, plagiarisms. Byron's powers of imitation were developed in an unusual degree. His powers of invention were, in comparison, slight. When, therefore, he ceased to read, he ceased to write; and after reading, it was next to impossible for him not to write. So strong, in fact, was this passion of imitation, that I have no doubt what Byron said of two or three of his poems, "If I had not written this, I should have gone mad," is the literal interpretation of what he felt. His writing fits came over him like a rage, and when this rage was on, writing was not only a relief, but a necessity. When, however, the writing fit was over—when, to use his own words, "he had emptied his mind"—he sank back into that state of lethargy and indifference which frequently led him to doubt the powers, and sometimes the existence of his own genius, once

or twice to make up his mind that literature was not his vocation, and to announce to Murray that the days of his authorship were ended. His mind, after most of his efforts, was a blank; and he sought in travel, in dissipation, too often in profligate life, the relief that every mind, except that of a Scott, must have after a great effort. But the first book he took up after "repeopling his mind with Nature," set him off again; and in his Diary you may generally trace every phase in the period of his intellectual gestation, from the first conception of a poem till its birth, and from its birth through that period of puberty which is represented by printer's proofs scrawled all over with corrections and additions, till the day when it was put to press, and ushered into the world with all its blushing honours thick upon it. Most, if not perhaps all of Byron's poems, are thus at once the reflex of his reading and of his travels. If it were necessary, I could cite a dozen illustrations of this; two or three will, however, be sufficient for my purpose. Take *Manfred*. I have referred to this poem in a previous paragraph, to show how closely Byron reproduced the recollection of his wanderings in his descriptions of scenery. It supplies us with an equally striking illustration of his habit of reproducing the recollections of his reading. *Manfred* is *Faust* in an English dress. The opening scenes of Goëthe's poem and the opening scenes of Byron's are identical. Byron was quite unconscious

of this resemblance, and resented the charge when it was first put forth by Goëthe; but it turned out, upon second thoughts, that Monk Lewis had translated most of *Faust* to Byron *vivâ voce* at Coligny. This, however, was enough for Byron. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was modelled upon the *Dunciad.* The Paraphrase of the *Art of Poetry* is worked out upon a suggestion of Dr. Johnson's. Sardanapalus is the shadow of the portrait of Otho in Juvenal; and Don Juan is a copy of the Page in the *Marriage of Figaro.*

Byron tells us himself how he disciplined his mind by draughts of Pope and Milton to write his satire; and Moore relates a suggestive conversation that passed between him and his friend at Venice. Byron was then at work upon *Don Juan.*

"On the day preceding that of my departure from Venice"—I quote Moore's own words—"my noble host, on arriving from La Mira to dinner, told me, with all the glee of a schoolboy who had been just granted a holiday, that, as this was my last evening, the Contessa had given him leave to 'make a night of it,' and that accordingly he would not only accompany me to the opera, but we should sup together at some *café* (as in the old times) afterwards. Observing a volume in his gondola with a number of paper-marks between the leaves, I inquired of him what it was.

"Only a book," he answered, "from which I am

trying to *crib*, as I do wherever I can; and that's the way I get the character of an original poet."

On taking it up, and looking into it, Moore found it to be his "old friend Agathon!"

"What!" said Byron archly, "you have been beforehand with me there, have you?"

I do not know a better illustration of Byron's mode of working than *Sardanapalus*. The history of that is complete. The germ thought of the tragedy is, as I have said, to be found in Juvenal's description of Otho. Sardanapalus is but Otho under another name. The portrait is etched by the Roman poet; Byron adds nothing but the colour; and with this key in your hand you may trace the progress of the work step by step in Byron's Diary. Here are a few extracts:—

"*January* 13, 1821, *Saturday*.—Sketched the outline and *drams. pers.* of an intended tragedy of *Sardanapalus*, which I have for some time meditated. Took the names from Diodorus Siculus (I know the history of Sardanapalus, and have known it since I was twelve years old); and read over a passage in the ninth volume octavo of Mitford's *Greece*, where he rather vindicates the memory of this last of the Assyrians."

"*January* 14, 1821.—Turned over Seneca's tragedies. Wrote the opening lines of the intended tragedy of *Sardanapalus*. Rode out some miles into the forest. Misty and rainy. Returned—dined—

wrote some more of my tragedy. Read Diodorus Siculus—turned over Seneca, and some other books. Wrote some more of the tragedy. Took a glass of grog. After having ridden hard in rainy weather, and scribbled, and scribbled again, the spirits (at least mine) need a little exhilaration, and I don't like laudanum now as I used to do. So I have mixed a glass of strong waters and single waters, which I shall now proceed to empty. Therefore and thereunto I conclude this day's diary."

"*February* 15, 1821.—Last night finished the first act of *Sardanapalus*. To-night, or to-morrow, I ought to answer letters."

"RAVENNA, *May* 28, 1821.—Since my last of the 26th or 25th, I have dashed off my fifth act of the tragedy called *Sardanapalus*. But now comes the copying over, which may prove heavy work—heavy to the writer as to the reader."

To talk of inspiration after confessions like these, of the necessity of a man of poetical temperament possessing a strong passion of some kind, and to call poetry the dream of the sleeping passions, is at the first blush, a little startling to people who can only pretend to comprehend the intellectual operations of genius from the autobiographies of poets themselves.

Yet, in the main, the history of *Sardanapalus* is, I believe, the history of most of Byron's works. They were the result partly of reading, partly of

original thought; partly, that is, of memory, and partly of imagination. Take the *Corsair*, the *Prisoner of Chillon*, the *Bride of Abydos*, the *Lament of Tasso*, *Don Juan*, or any of Byron's works—trace its history by the light of his Diary and correspondence, or by the recollections of his friends, and you must be a particularly inapt scholar if you cannot discover its germ thought either in an after-dinner conversation with Shelley or Moore—in the legend of an old ruin—in Goethe, Rousseau, or Schiller—in an incident of Lord Byron's own life—in a satire of Juvenal, or in the traditions of the scenes through which he had recently passed. Lord Byron's mind was like an Æolian harp; the gentlest breeze, the slightest hint, was sufficient to evoke its music; but without this breeze, without this hint, it was silent. Looking through an old romance picked up at a roadside inn, listening to the song of a Swiss maid in the mountains, reading the letters of Catherine de' Medici, visiting the cell of Tasso, and turning over the manuscript of his *Jerusalem*—any trifle of this kind was sufficient to fire Byron's imagination; and when once his faculties had been put in motion, when the chords of the Æolian harp had been touched, a host of associations at once crowded into his mind; all the recollections of his travels—Greece, with her heroes, and her temples in shattered splendour; the Ægean, with its glittering waters and its pirates; Calypso's Isles, with all their mantling traditions;

Albania, with its castled crags, and the pale crescent sparkling in its glens; the Rhine, with its streams and dells,

> "Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine,
> And chiefless castles breathing stern farewells
> From gray but leafy walls;"

the Bernese Alps, with their glaciers and their torrents;—and then Byron must, as he said, empty his mind, or go mad.

Any one who will take the trouble to go through Byron with a microscope may trace out many of his thoughts, many of his expressions, many of his finest illustrations in his diaries and correspondence, hastily and roughly jotted down, perhaps for the eye of his sister, of Moore, or of Murray, and then probably forgotten, but recalled the moment they were needed, even though it might be years after, and worked up afresh in his poetry, as vividly as if they were only the impressions of yesterday, or the impromptus of the moment.

This is what the world calls genius. To understand its working, says Ruskin, we must picture to ourselves "all that men of genius have seen and heard in the whole course of their lives, laid up accurately in their memory, as in storehouses, extending with the poets even to the slightest intonations of syllables heard in the beginning of their lives, and with painters down to the minutest folds of drapery and shapes

of leaves and stones; and over all this unindexed and immeasurable mass of treasure, the imagination, brooding and wandering, but dream-gifted, so as to summon at a moment exactly such a group of ideas as shall justly fit each other."

What Byron called his "estro" was this intense exercise of all the faculties of his mind, of his imagination and memory, of his wit and fancy; and it was the concentration of all his faculties upon the accomplishment of his work, and their concentration in what I may call a state of preternataral excitement, that made him describe a man's poetry as a distinct faculty or soul—a faculty that had no more to do with the everyday individual than inspiration with the Pythoness when removed from her tripod. Consistently with this notion, Byron calls his poetry sometimes a dream of the sleeping passions, and sometimes the expression of excited passion. I should prefer to vary the terms of his description, and to call it the expression of excited thought — reproducing the dreams of the passions. The difference is but trifling; but in the altered form this is an apt description of the spirit in which Byron generally sat down to work. All his poems were written, in the first instance, by fits and starts, roughened ofi, to use his own expression, after reading and cogitation for half the day, written, that is, as fast as their author could put pen to paper, and generally, I may add, written at night, frequently after two o'clock in the morning.

These were Byron's favourite hours of work. All *Don Juan* and most of *Childe Harold* were roughened off by the lamp; but, with the striking exception of the *Corsair* and *Lara*, none of these drafts were passed into the hands of the printer without careful and elaborate revision and correction. Most of them were copied out again stanza by stanza. This was the heaviest part of Byron's work at the desk; and it was the only part that he thoroughly detested. He complains of it again and again; and speaking of *Don Juan*, he says: "I loathe this task of copying so much, that if there was a human being who could copy my blotted manuscripts, he should have all they can ever bring for his trouble." Several of these original drafts of Byron's poems are in the possession of Mr. Murray; and they amply bear out all that Byron says of them. They are as illegible as careless and hasty writing, and still hastier corrections, could possibly make them; for Byron wrote with remarkable fluency and rapidity. His thoughts, when he had once got into a writing vein, never moved sluggishly. They were generally far ahead of his pen; and dashing off his verses as he did, partly under the inspiration of genius, and partly under that of strong waters, one may easily conceive what sort of copy Byron sent to the printer. Even when writing at leisure, his hand was, as he said, as bad as his character—even as that character was painted by himself.

Yet this was a case where an amanuensis, even if he could have deciphered Byron's blurred and blotted manuscripts, could have been of no possible service; for it was not simply a fair copy of his verses that Byron wanted. When Byron sat down to copy out his rough drafts, he sat down with books of reference and a Dictionary of Rhymes at his elbow; and much as he professed to despise the file, few men of his genius have altered and corrected and furbished up their poems more than Byron did. Moore took the trouble to go through the original drafts of some of Byron's poems, and to compare them with the finished copy; and his comparisons are striking and suggestive. In the original draft of *Childe Harold*, the little Page and the Yeoman were referred to in five or six lines of little or no beauty. The light and sparkling lyric which now relieves the gloom of the first canto is an after-thought. It was, as Byron acknowledges in his preface, suggested by a song in Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy*. The *Song to Inez*, too, is anything but an "unpremeditated lay." In the original manuscript, it was a mere bit of sing-song:

> "O never tell again to me
> Of southern climes and British ladies;
> It has not been your lot to see,
> Like me, the lovely girl of Cadiz."

What it is now, all the world knows. The *Bride of Abydos* originally began with the second stanza; the first, as it now stands, "Know ye the land," &c.,

was added in copying. These beautiful lines are said to have been suggested by a song of Goethe's.

At the outset of his career Byron found considerable difficulty in arranging his thoughts; and he tried a plan then very prevalent in Germany, and still practised, I believe, by the Poet Laureate, of having his manuscript set up in type, and of correcting and re-arranging it in proofs. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was set up in this way by a printer at Newark. This, however, was impossible when Byron was abroad; and the poet had thus to copy his MS. afresh with his own hand. But even after copying out a poem in this way, and correcting it in manuscript Byron scrawled corrections in the margin of his proof, till Murray and his printers were almost out of their senses. Take the *Giaour*, for instance. In its original form—in the form, that is, in which the manuscript left Byron's desk—the *Giaour* was only a poem of four hundred lines. It is now one thousand four hundred, and many of the most striking and beautiful passages that distinguish the poem were added in the proof. That exquisite bit of description which now forms the second paragraph in the opening lines of the *Giaour*, "Fair clime where every season smiles," &c., is not in the manuscript: it was added in the first proof; and when the revise with this addition came into Byron's hands, he superadded twenty or thirty more lines to carry out his vein, starting with the lines :

"For there, the rose o'er crag or vale,
Sultana of the nightingale," &c.

The third paragraph, comparing the desolation of Greece to the loveliness of death—

"Before Decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where Beauty lingers;"

the impassioned verses opening with, "My memory now is but the tomb," and the lines, "The cygnet proudly walks the waters," were all proof corrections —"bits of purple" patched into the poem; and in most cases the piecing is obvious to those who know Byron's habits of composition. His verbal alterations were endless; and they were all marked by the delicate touch of the scholar and the poet.

Here are a couple of versions of one of the most striking of his passages. It occurs in the *Giaour:* Rough draft—

"Fair clime! where *ceaseless summer* smiles
Benignant o'er those blessed isles
Which, seen from far Colonna's height,
Make glad the heart that hails the sight,
And *give* to loneliness delight.
There *shine the bright abodes ye seek*
Like dimples upon Ocean's cheek,
So smiling round the waters lave
These Edens of the Eastern wave."

Revised version—

"Fair clime! where every season smiles
Benignant o'er those blessed isles

Which, seen from far Colonna's height,
Make glad the heart that hails the sight,
And lend to loneliness delight.
There, mildly dimpling, Ocean's cheek
Repeats the tints of many a peak,
Caught by the laughing tides that lave
These Edens of the Eastern wave."

Rough draft—

"Or if at times the transient breeze
Break the *smooth* crystal of the seas,
Or *brush* one blossom from the trees,
How *grateful* is the gentle air
That wakes and wafts the *fragrance* there."

Revised version—

"And if at times a transient breeze
Break the blue crystal of the seas,
Or sweep one blossom from the trees,
How welcome is the gentle air
That wakes and wafts the odours there."

And this is but a sample of the keen and critical spirit in which Byron revised all his poems. Some of the best of his single lines even were varied, and altered and transposed, till the printer must have been anathematising the poet as freely as the poet anathematised the printer. Take, for instance, the line in the *Bride of Abydos*:—

"The mind, the music breathing from her face."

This in the first draft of the poem took the form of—

"Mind on her lip and music in her face."

It was afterwards in the proof turned into—

> "The mind of music breathing in her face."

The finishing touches of those beautiful lines—

> "Or, since that hope denied in worlds of strife,
> Be thou the rainbow to the storms of life!
> The evening beam that smiles the clouds away
> And tints to-morrow with prophetic ray!"

were developed by the self-same process. Byron wrote at first—

> "And tints to-morrow with a fancied ray;"

and then interpolated "an airy ray," asking Murray to choose which of the two epithets he thought best, "or, if neither will do, tell me, and I will dream another." "Prophetic," was the result of his next dream; and thus the line stands, perfect and beautiful, the exact reflex of the thought in the poet's mind.

Of course this sort of work was the work of the critic in contradistinction to the work of the poet. But even this file work with Byron, must be done, if it was to be done at all, while "the estro" was on. "All the feelings under which this was written," Byron says, speaking of the *Giaour* in a note to Murray, "are gone, and the poem must go as it stands. I cannot recall my feelings, and to attempt to correct it without is only to mar it. The tree must lie as it fell." The rapidity with which Byron wrote most of his poetry was startling in comparison

with that of most of his contemporaries. Wordsworth thought he did well if he got through 200 lines a week. Byron threw off this quantity in a single morning. Scott wrote his Lay at the rate of a canto a week, and thought that fast work. But with the single exception of *Don Juan,* Byron never I believe kept any of his works on hand for more than a month at a stretch. The cantos of *Childe Harold* were begun when spending a few days with Ali Pacha, at Joannina in Albania, and finished in a caravansary at Smyrna; and they were written probably when Hobhouse was posting up his journal, to kill the time that hung upon his hands. Several of the descriptions of Albanian scenes in Hobhouse's Travels are almost identical with *Childe Harold,* and it is not at all improbable that what Byron did, was to take his companion's notes as hints to work out in *Childe Harold.* This is what he did in his description of Rome; and till Hobhouse had put his mind into the right train of thought and reflection, Byron was puzzling himself with the question where he was to begin and what he was to talk about. The hints which Hobhouse gave him for his account of the ruins of Rome on this occasion, Byron generally sought for himself when alone out of *Guides* and books of travel. You may trace many of Byron's thoughts in this way, in their first rough form, in handbooks and works of travel which must have fallen in his way. The most striking of these appro-

priations that occurs to me at the moment, is that which forms the key-note to his famous description of Greece in the *Giaour*. This description is one of the most striking and beautiful to be found in English poetry, and contains, as Jeffrey said, an image more true, more mournful, and more exquisitely finished than any in the whole compass of poetry. Yet the original suggestion of this image is to be found in a work which, without much stress of the imagination, we may well suppose Byron to have had at his elbow to assist him with touches of local colour when writing his Eastern romances—I mean Dallaway's *Constantinople*. The image in this work is put in its plainest form—"The present state of Greece compared to the ancient is the silent obscurity of the grave contrasted with the vivid lustre of active life." But the barest hint of an image of this kind was, to a man like Byron, enough; and the key once touched, his imagination and fancy poured forth a stream of poetry of the richest and rarest hues. Upon the strength of hints like this, he often threw off as many lines at a sitting of three or four hours as Moore and Southey, with their systematic habits of work, accomplished in a fortnight. A dozen lines a day, kept up for a week, Moore thought quick work when writing *Lalla Rookh* or the *Loves of the Angels*; and Southey, with all his fluency, hardly ever tasked himself beyond forty or fifty lines a day. But Byron thought nothing of throwing off 120 lines after break-

fast, or when he returned from the theatre in the evening.

Unlike Moore, however, Byron hardly ever broke the current of his thought to correct or polish a line. He left this for the proofs, or till he had accomplished his task, and sat down in the after-glow of his inspiration to re-copy his MS. His descriptions of scenery were almost all written on the spot, or within a day or two afterwards, while the scene was still fresh in his eye; for, as he says in one of his notes, he could not reproduce his recollections with the freshness which poetry requires over a sea-coal fire. Most of his description of the Bernese Alps was written at a little roadside inn at the foot of the mountains; and his Ode to Parnassus was composed "among the sacred hollows of Delphi," with the snowy neck of the mountain, as it first presented itself to him, towering on the other side of the gulph, still in his eye, "in the wild power of mountain majesty." He could not conjure with his imagination like Moore; and except in two or three cases, never, I believe, attempted to picture in his mind's eye what he had not seen. Of the gift of poetical second-sight Byron knew nothing; and it was the want of this gift probably that led Byron to believe that with him poetry was a special faculty, acting in some mysterious way upon its own volition.

Perhaps no man was less of a poet, except with a pen in his hand, than Byron; and as a piquant illus-

tration of the contrast between Byron as a poet and Byron as a man, it is said that the farewell lines to his wife were accompanied by a butcher's bill, with a query endorsed on its back, requesting Lady Byron to look it through and let him know whether all the meat charged for had been had in the house. The *Hebrew Melodies,* on the other hand, were written in the middle of a London season, when frollicking about town with Moore, coquetting with ballet girls at Drury Lane and with countesses at Almack's, and dining with Kean—and Jackson the pugilist. Byron had a horror of the desk and of its work. It was a place of torture to him, and, like Moore, he was perplexed at finding that any one could take the least pleasure in writing. That this should be inconceivable to a man who wrote as slow and painfully as Moore one can quite understand; for as Moore tells us in one of his notes, he always felt about his art as the French husband did when he found a man making love to his wife—"Comment, Monsieur, sans y être obligé!" But in the case of a man who wrote with the ease and fluency of Byron, one might have supposed that the hours which he spent at his desk would have been hours of the highest pleasure. Yet these hours, as he tells us, were his aversion. "I feel exactly as you do about our art," he says to Moore, "but it comes over me in a kind of rage every now and then, and then if I don't employ my mind I go mad. As to that regular unin-

terrupted love of writing (which Moore had been describing in one of his friends) I do not understand it. I feel it is a torture I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain."

It forms no part of my plan to speak of Byron personally in contradistinction to the poet; but it is necessary to the completeness of the sketch to add that Byron thought, like Burns, that a life of personal purity was inconsistent with the full development of genius in a man of his temperament. It is possible, of course, that this may be an after-thought in both cases, to cover, in the eyes of their friends, those irregularities which stained the names and polluted the genius of both. But this concurrence of opinion is worth noting, and the plea is put forward by both poets in almost the same terms. Had Lord Byron led the life of a gentleman usher from five and twenty to thirty, we should never have had *Don Juan;* but is there any reason in the nature of things why a goldstick-in-waiting, with the genius of Byron, might not have written *Childe Harold* or the *Corsair?* I see none; and yet it is on these poems in the long run that the fame of Byron must rest. The question, however, is an interesting one to those who care to trace it out, although its discussion would take me too far afield in a sketch merely intended to give a picture of Byron at his desk.

WORDSWORTH.

ILLUSTRATING his habits of work, Wordsworth was very fond of relating how, when a stray visitor at Rydal Mount, after walking through his grounds, once asked permission of one of his servants to see the poet's study, she led him into a little room containing a handful of books lying about on the table, sofa, and shelves, and remarking: "This is master's library, where he keeps his books; but" (returning to the door) "his *study* is out of doors;" and, with that, courtesied the visitor into the garden again. Most of his verses were first murmured in the open air, on the mountain, the moor, the lakes of Windermere, on the sea-shore, or on the banks of some babbling brook; and his nephew, Dr. Wordsworth, tells us in his interesting biography, that nothing was commoner than to hear the poet's neighbours remark, after his return from one of his trips: "Well, there he is; we are glad to hear him *booing* about again."

This habit of booing about was contracted early in life, and it was the last of his habits to be abandoned. What he said when a youth of eighteen, travelling in Switzerland with twenty pounds in his pockets, and his "needments" tied up

in a pocket-handkerchief, to be carried on his head, was true of him, when, at eighty, he asked his wife to throw open the window, that he might see the sun rise once more, and once more catch a glimpse of the Terrace, where he had composed the *Excursion*, hear the thrush pouring out her notes in the tall ash in the garden, see the waters of Windermere, and catch a glimpse of the fells of Loughrigg, with the solitary crag which the poet had capped with an imperial castle. He was a perfect enthusiast in his admiration of nature in all her forms; and from his habit of investing scenery with thought, of drawing all his illustrations from the scenes around him, and of working up the thoughts suggested by a morning stroll with a friend, a roadside conversation with a peasant girl, a leech-gatherer, or a gipsy, he has consecrated with his genius every spot that is associated with his memory—the Derwent, with its shattered monument of feudal sway, which mingled its murmurs with his nurse's song, and from its

> "Fords and shallows sent a voice
> That flowed along his dreams;"

the Vale of Esthwaite, with its gray huts scattered among the trees in the meadows, and the twilight glens; the old school-room where he

> "Began to spin, with toil, his earliest songs;"

the cottage, with its garden, its brook, and its pine trees, where he lay awake

"On summer nights to watch
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves
Of a tall ash;"

the grassy churchyard hanging

"Upon a slope above the village school,"

and crowned with its snow-white church,

"Like a throned lady sending out
A gracious look all over her domain;"

Racedown, with its pleasant house, its walks, and garden, and its well-stocked library, where he first met

"A noticeable man, with large gray eyes,
And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly
As if a blooming face it ought to be,"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who, as they

"Lay upon the moss by brook or tree,"

charmed the hours away, talking with that musical voice of his of Ariosto, of Shakspeare, of Milton, and Spenser, and the great Lords of Song; Alfoxden, with its glens, its deer, its groves, its sequestered waterfalls, its glimpses of the sea through the trees, and of the picturesque Tor of Glastonbury, with its traditions of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, where Coleridge

"In bewitching words, with happy heart,
[Chanted] the vision of that Ancient Man,
The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful woes
Did utter of the Lady Christabel;"

Grasmere, with its crags, its woody steeps, its lake,

> "Its one green island and its winding shores,
> The multitude of little rocky hills,
> Its church and cottages of mountain stone
> Clustered like stars" . . . . .

and Rydal Mount, with its gables mantling with roses and ivy, its parterres, its gray gravel walks, where the poet

> "Scattered to the heedless winds
> The vocal raptures of fresh poesy;"

its sparkling cascades, its secret bridge

> "Half gray, half shagged with ivy to the ridge;"

and its terraces on the mountain side, overlooking the Vale of Rothay and the glittering waters of Windermere, with Wansfell standing out in the horizon, where he strolled hour after hour,

> "Locked
> In earnest converse with beloved friends,"

Coleridge, Southey, De Quincey, Christopher North, or the author of *Waverley*, talking, perhaps, of the time when his writings, like theirs, would be in all hands, the delight at once of the scholar and the peasant, and when even the critics, reversing the verdict of Jeffrey and his *Review*, would recognise in the author of what Byron called the fusty and frowsy *Excursion*, the greatest poet in our literature since Milton, and discover in his works (as Lord

Lytton does) "an influence of a more noble and purely intellectual character than any writer of our age or nation has exercised."

This was Wordsworth's conviction, from the first day that he took up a pen to jot down one of his Lyrical Ballads. He believed it to be his mission to found a new school of poetry, to give the charm of novelty to the things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; and with this idea of his mission in his head, he was never tired of asking people to see how he spiritualised character, and the imaginative influences which he threw over common life, in Lucy Gray, for instance; in contrast with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of handling subjects of the same kind, or of tracing the influence of this theory of his in the writings of Byron. The whole of the third canto of *Childe Harold,* he said, was founded on his style and sentiments; and the feelings of natural objects which Byron expresses, were not caught from nature, as they profess to be, but from his own writings, and *spoilt in the transmission!* Tintern Abbey Wordsworth looked upon as the main source of Byron's thoughts; and to this poem he was in the habit of tracing Byron's famous passage about solitude in the first canto of *Childe Harold.* In Wordsworth's eyes every object in nature was invested with a halo of

poetry: a thorn on a hill-side overgrown with lichens, an old huntsman in his tattered scarlet coat talking of his hounds, a

> "Solitary Highland lass
> Reaping and singing by herself"

in the harvest-field, a group of children gathering flowers on the banks of a stream, the notes of the cuckoo, the shadows of the falling leaves dancing amid sunshine. He found a poem in every glen, a romance in every ruin or castled crag; and, consistently with his theory of poetry, he never hesitated to follow in thought wheresoever he could find "an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings." "Poetry," he said finely, "is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. It is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science;" and, in his opinion, the appropriate business of poetry, her privilege and her duty, is "to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear, not as they exist in themselves, but as they seem to exist in the senses and to the passions." He has thus been called the English Plato; and the phrase is an apt description of his genius and tone of thought. His appreciation of the diversified beauty of nature was as keen and as pure as that of the keenest and purest of the Greeks; and when contemplating nature, he, too, like the Greeks, loved—to use his own phrase—"to send the soul into her-

self," to analyse his sensations, and to picture to himself in their most vivid colours "the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature."

This was Wordsworth's theory of poetry. To the Edinburgh Reviewers, and to the mass of people, it was, and is still, perhaps, foolishness. But to Wordsworth it was a living faith; and when strolling through the woods at Abbotsford with Sir Walter Scott, he went off into raptures about the "delightful variety of life and thought in trees," he was simply expressing the idea which was probably always uppermost in his mind. Years and years before, writing to his sister from a Swiss cottage in the Alps, he had expressed the thought that underlay this remark, by a touching description of his sensations at quitting scenes with which, as he says, "I have, as it were, conversed so long, and with such increasing pleasure, that the idea of parting from them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend." He idolised Rydal Mount as much as it was in his nature to idolise anything, and often asked himself what would become of it after his time. "Will the old walls and steps remain in front of the house and about the grounds, or will they be swept away, with all the beautiful mosses and ferns, and wild geraniums, and other flowers which their rude construction suffered and encouraged to grow among

them? This little wild flower, 'Poor Robin,' is here constantly courting my attention, and exciting what may be called a domestic interest, with the varying aspects of its stalks, and leaves, and flowers. Strangely do the tastes of men differ, according to their employments and habits of life. 'What a nice well would that be,' said a labouring man to me one day, 'if all that rubbish was cleared off!' The *rubbish*," Wordsworth adds, with horror at the man's sacrilegious spirit, "was some of the most beautiful mosses, and lichens, and ferns, and other wild growths that could possibly be seen."

This feeling runs through all Wordsworth's poetry. It is the feeling which gives such a charm, in the eyes of those who enter into the spirit of his poems, to all the scenes associated with his genius. It is, however, a feeling that can be appreciated only by those whose minds are attuned in sympathy with that of the poet. These, I need hardly say, are the choice spirits of the world; and with these, and these only, will Wordsworth's poetry be anything more than the *Excursion* was to Byron and the *White Doe of Rylstone* to Jeffrey. It will never be popular; that is to say, it will never be read as Scott is read, as Byron is read, as Tennyson is read. You need no eye but an eye for the picturesque, no soul but a soul for the strong passions of our nature, to read *Marmion, Childe Harold,* the *Corsair,* and the *Idylls of the King;* but to read Wordsworth, you must be

yourself "a poet in all but words." Take the *White Doe of Rylstone.* To read that, you must send the soul in upon herself; you must think nothing of Scott, or how Scott would have worked up a legend of this description; you must think still less of Byron. "It starts from a high point of the imagination," as Wordsworth said, criticising the poem towards the close of his career, when he had ceased to think of literary fame except as the dream of his youth, to be realised, if at all, two or three generations hence, "and comes round, through various wanderings of that faculty, to a still higher—nothing less than the apotheosis of the animal who gives the first of the two titles to the poem. And as the poem thus begins and ends with pure and lofty imagination, every motive and impetus that actuates the persons introduced is from the same source; a kindred spirit pervades, and is intended to harmonise the whole. Throughout, objects (the banner for instance) derive their influence, not from properties inherent in them, not from what they *are* actually in themselves, but from such as are *bestowed* upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects. Thus, the poetry, if there be any in the work, proceeds, as it ought to do, from the *soul of man,* communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world." Of course, this is not the sort of poem to be taken up and read in a careless way after dinner, like Scott's

or Byron's. It is a poem to be studied as a work of thought and a work of art; but those who read Wordsworth in this spirit, make his poetry part of their nature, rank him with Milton and Shakspeare, and speak of his genius with the deepest reverence and affection.

These of course are, and always will be, a narrow and select circle of readers; for Wordsworth's poetry is, and probably always will be, *caviare* to the multitude. All his poems taken together, his *Lyrics*, his *Prelude*, his *Borderers*, his *White Doe of Rylstone*, and his *Excursion*, did not bring him in the long course of his life what Scott and Byron received for the worst of theirs. "The whole of my returns," he says, writing to his friend Archdeacon Wrangham, "I do not say net profits, but returns from the writing trade, do not amount to seven-score pounds;" and, except Milton selling his manuscript of *Paradise Lost* for the price of a newspaper article, I know nothing more touching in the history of literature than Wordsworth's reflection towards the close of his career: "I have laboured hard through a long life without more pecuniary emolument than a lawyer gets for two special retainers, or a public performer sometimes for two or three songs." Yet this, as Wordsworth knew, was the price that he must pay for immortality, if he wished to base his chances of enduring fame on a theory of poetry too high for the critical intelligence of his own day; and he never

flinched from the terms of his bond. His ambition was to be either considered a teacher, as he believed all great poets to be, or nothing; and that ambition, after a struggle, he has realised. He met the scorn of criticism with scorn. He had but one answer for his assailants: "Let the age continue to love its own darkness; I shall continue to write with, I trust, the light of Heaven upon me." But that was enough. His genius has vindicated itself; and the immortality he looked for is his.

How, when, and where Wordsworth composed his poems, his principles of composition, the staple of his thought—where, that is, he gathered the incidents upon which he exercised his imagination, and what suggested the imagery in which he clothed his ideas—we know with more particularity than in the case of any poet except Edgar Allan Poe. Growing, as most of his poetry did, out of his own personal history, out of his rambles in the hills and dales of his native county, or his wanderings on the banks of the Rhine or the Loire, in the cantons of Switzerland, or the pleasant valleys of Italy, or out of conversation with his sister and his friends, the poet was able, years after, to trace out the exact spot where this or that thought struck him, and this or that poem was written, to relate the incident that suggested this sonnet or that narrative; and in his old age there were never wanting loving friends to treasure up

every scrap of information upon points like these that fell from his lips in his table-talk.

What he said of his first poem, the *Evening Walk,* that there was not an image in it that he had not drawn from his own observation of nature, and that he could point out the time and place where most of them were noticed, was true of all of them. His description of the oak entwining

"Its darkening boughs and leaves in stronger lines,"

is drawn from nature. "I recollect distinctly," he said, "where this first struck me. It was on the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history, for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country so far as I was acquainted with them; and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency."

His *Descriptive Sketches,* again, were representations of scenes and incidents that had struck his fancy when strolling with the republican General Beaupuis on the banks of the Loire. It was there, in fact, that the Sketches themselves were for the most part written; and the habits of composition thus formed in his youth characterised him all through his life. Nine-tenths of his verses, he used to say,

were first of all murmured in the open air; and it needs very little stretch of imagination, with the hints scattered through his sister's diary, to picture the poet in the grove at Alfoxden, under the shade of his apple-trees in the orchard at Grasmere, on the banks of the brook that runs through Easedale, or on the terraces of Rydal Mount, pouring forth his unpremeditated lays in verse, and pouring them forth very often as perfect and as musical as the notes of the birds around him. *We are Seven* was thrown off in this way. "I composed it," he tells us, "while walking in the grove at Alfoxden." The heroine of the piece Wordsworth had met two or three years before within the area of Goderich Castle; and recalling his conversation with her, he turned it into the gem that we now know it. It was not thrown off, however, like most of its companion pieces, in its present form: it was put together in scraps; the last stanza, for instance, was composed first, and the poet began even this stanza with the last line.

"When it was all but finished," he says, "I came in and recited it to Mr. Coleridge and my sister, and said: 'A prefatory stanza must be added, and I should sit down to our little tea-meal with greater pleasure if my task was finished.' I mentioned in subject what I wished to be expressed, and Coleridge immediately threw off the stanza thus:

"A little child, dear brother Jem."

I objected to the rhyme, "dear brother Jem," as being ludicrous; but we all enjoyed the joke of hitching in our friend James Tobin's name, who was familiarly called Jem. He was the brother of the dramatist. The said Jem got a sight of the *Lyrical Ballads*, as it was going through the press at Bristol, during which time I was residing in that city. One evening he came to me with a grave face, and said: 'Wordsworth, I have seen the volume that Coleridge and you are about to publish; there is one poem in it which I earnestly entreat you will cancel, for, if published, it will make you everlastingly ridiculous.' I answered, that I felt much obliged to him for the interest he took in my good name as a writer, and begged to know what was the unfortunate piece he alluded to. He said: 'It is called *We are Seven.*' 'Nay,' said I, 'that shall take its chance, however;' and he left me in despair."

Most of the poems that were written at Grasmere were originally composed either in the orchard or on the banks of the Easedale. This was the most productive period of his life; and he always spoke of his literary work there with the greatest pleasure. The Easedale was associated in his memory with the pleasantest recollections. "I have composed thousands of verses," he used to say, "by the side of it." His first sonnets were written here. "In the cottage of Town End, one afternoon in 1801, my sister read to me the Sonnets of Milton. I had long been

well acquainted with them; but I was particularly struck on that occasion with the dignified simplicity and majestic harmony that runs through most of them—in character so totally different from the Italian, and still more so from Shakspeare's fine sonnets. I took fire, if I may be allowed to say so, and produced three sonnets the same afternoon, the first I ever wrote, except an irregular one at school. Of these three the only one I distinctly remember is, *I Grieved for Bonaparte,* &c.; one of the others was never written down; the third, which was, I believe, preserved, I cannot particularise." It was here, too, that the *Excursion* was planned, under the title of the *Pedlar.* His sister has given us a vivid and characteristic description of the poet's life at this period.

"*Feb.* 5, 1802.—Translated two or three of Lessing's *Fables.* At this time William hard at work on *The Pedlar.*

"*March* —.—William reading Ben Jonson.

"*Thursday.*—William writing *The Singing Bird,* or *The Sailor's Mother.* Mr. Clarkson came.

"*Friday.* — Read the remainder of Lessing. William wrote *Alice Fell.*

"*Saturday.*—William wrote the poem of *The Beggar Woman,* taken from a woman whom I had seen nearly two years ago. Next morning at breakfast he wrote the poem *To a Butterfly:* the thought came upon him as we were talking about the pleasure we both always felt at the sight of a butterfly.

I told him that I used in my childhood to chase them, but was afraid of brushing the dust off their wings.

"*Tuesday.*—William went to the orchard, and wrote a part of *The Emigrant Mother*. After dinner read Spenser.

"*March* 26.—William altered the *Silver Bow* poem; wrote *The Rainbow*.

"*March* 28.—Went to Keswick, to Calvert's.

"*April* 7.—William went to Middleton.

"*April* 13.—William returned.

"*Tuesday, April* 20.—William wrote the conclusion to the Poem *To a Butterfly*: 'I've watched you,' &c. Coleridge came.

"*Wednesday, April* 28.—We went into the orchard after breakfast, and sat there. The lake calm, sky cloudy. William began poem on *The Celandine*.

"*May* 1.—Sowed flower seeds. William helped me. We sat in the orchard. William wrote *The Celandine*. Planned an arbour; the sun too hot for us.

"*May* 7.—William wrote *The Leech Gatherer*.

"*May* 21.—William wrote two sonnets on Buonaparte, after I had read Milton's *Sonnets* to him.

"*May* 29.—William wrote his poem *On going to M. H.* I wrote it out.

"*June* 8.—William wrote the poem *The Sun has long been set*.

"*June* 17.—William added to the Ode he is writing."

To throw off six hundred verses in the course of a month, Wordsworth thought a trifle; and considering his powers of composition, and the assiduity with which they were exercised, perhaps we may agree that it was. He read very little, and wrote less, and rarely had a poem of some sort out of his thoughts, riding or walking. Even when crossing Westminster Bridge on the roof of the Dover coach, between five and six o'clock in the morning, he was turning over a sonnet in his mind; and when he was strolling about in Scotland, or Italy, or Germany, often walking twenty miles a day, by the side of his carriage, with Dora, or his sister, he was composing verses. Most of his poems were thus influenced by his own circumstances when writing them. The *Warning*, for instance, was composed on horseback, when the poet was riding from Moresby in a snow-storm. Hence the simile in that poem:—

> "While thoughts press on and feelings overflow,
> And quick words round him fall like *flakes of snow*."

The lines on Haydon's portrait of the Duke of Wellington were composed during an ascent of Helvellyn with his daughter and her husband; and the sonnet,

> "The most alluring clouds,"

was thrown off on the impulse of the moment, one

evening when Wordsworth was returning home from his favourite walk along the Rotha, under Loughrigg.

When at Rydal Mount, however, Wordsworth composed most of his poetry pacing to and fro on the gray gravelled terraces which he had cut in the sides of the rock, and in the woods that fringed his garden. Here, in a laburnum, the poet kept the caged turtle-dove which he has immortalised in one of his trifles. "It was the habit of this bird," he tells us, "to begin cooing and murmuring whenever it heard me making my verses." It was on this terrace, to the murmurs of his dove, that Wordsworth thought out his *Thanksgiving Ode* in 1816. It was, like most of these small pieces, composed almost extempore, and composed, as he tells us, when waiting for the fall of the church-bell, and on such a morning, and with precisely such objects before his eyes as it describes. He calls it "a dramatised ejaculation."

Wordsworth was governed in the composition of his lyrics by a couple of rules—first, to trace out what he called the primary laws of our nature, and to trace them out as far as possible in the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation. These were his canons of poetry and style; and in the description of incidents and scenes from low and rustic life, Wordsworth tried, as he told Sir John Coleridge, to give the oral part of his story as nearly

as he could in the very words of the speakers or actors, dropping all vulgarisms and provincialisms, and borrowing sometimes a Bible turn of expression. Most of his poems, like Byron's, were thus based upon facts, sometimes slight in themselves; or incidents and expressions were thrown together, and thus made to illustrate each other. The poem of *Guilt and Sorrow* is an instance of this. The basis of this piece is a story which Wordsworth heard at the outset of his poetical career on Salisbury Plain; but all that relates to the heroine, as a soldier's wife in America, and her condition of mind during her voyage home, were faithfully taken from the report made to him of her own case by a friend, who had been subjected to the same trials, and affected in the same way.

In speaking of these poems and their origin, I have used the word composition in contradistinction to the word writing. The fact is Wordsworth very rarely wrote out his poems with his own hand. They were thought out line by line in his walks, kept in his memory till they were perfect in their rhythm and music, and then written by Dora, his sister, or his wife, from his dictation. Very frequently he did not touch a pen for three months together; often he could not hold it. His writing-desk was "a place of punishment to him;" and, as his writing sufficiently testified, he always bent to it with some degree of impatience. His own manu-

script was almost as illegible as Byron's. This arose partly from constitutional infirmities, a chronic weakness and irritation in his eyes, and partly from his habits of mind. To write even to his dearest friends was an irksome task; and had it not been for his sister, and his wife and daughter, it is probable that many of his verses, muttered by him on the roads, or on the hills, or on the terrace-walks of his own garden, would have been scattered to the winds—to quote Dr. Wordsworth's fine simile—"like the plaintive accents of the deserted Ariadne on the coast of Naxos,

'Quæ cuncta aerii discerpunt irrita venti,'

or like the fugitive verses of the Sibyl on the rocky shores of Cumæ."

When preparing these manuscripts for the press, however, he revised them in the keenest spirit of criticism. Poetry, he was never tired of repeating, is infinitely more of an *art* than men are prepared to believe; and carelessness in the finish of composition, Sir John Coleridge tells us, in his reminiscences of his visit to the Lakes, Wordsworth seemed to look upon almost as an offence. "I remember well, that after speaking with love and delight of a very popular volume of poetry, he yet found great fault with the want of correctness and finish. Reciting one of the poems, and pointing out inaccuracies in it, he said: 'I like the volume so much, that, if I

was the author, I think I should never rest till I had nearly re-written it," the art by which the thoughts are made to melt into each other, and to fall into light and shadow, regulated by distinct preconception of the best general effect they are capable of producing, he impressed upon every poet who sent him a copy of verses for criticism. He had a horror, too, of anything like "sparkle, antithesis, and that over-culture, which reminds one, by its broad glare, its stiffness, and heaviness, of the double daisies of the garden, compared with their modest and sensitive kindred of the fields." "When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life," he said, "I was impressed with a conviction that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton"—and to these I may add Virgil and Horace, as representing his ideal of perfection in poetic art. He recognised in them, but particularly in Virgil, the most consummate masters of language that perhaps ever existed. Forming his ideas of art upon these models, Wordsworth corrected all his poems with the most scrupulous care; and in one of his letters he has drawn a vivid picture of himself and his wife spelling out some of his "mangled and almost illegible manuscripts," and of her impatience of his trifling alterations and corrections.

The light and sparkling lyric in which the

daughters of Southey and Coleridge were grouped with his own under the title of the *Triad*, a lyric which he thought contained some of the best verses he ever wrote, was originally "thrown off rapidly in a fancy fit," and in this form it charmed all three of the *Triad;* but even this was afterwards revised with the greatest care. And this was the case with all his poems and sonnets. He kept the *Prelude* in hand for six years, altering, and correcting, and re-casting parts of it; yet when he had finished it, he seems to have looked upon the manuscript very much as Tasso looked upon the manuscript of his *Jerusalem*. "It was not a happy day for me," he says in a letter to Sir George Beaumont; "I was dejected on many accounts. When I looked back upon the performance, it seemed to have a dead weight about it—the reality so far short of the expectation." He kept the manuscript in his desk for forty-five years, only taking it out now and then to revise and re-correct it; and it was not published till after his death. The *Excursion* was the work of many years of hard labour. It was begun when Wordsworth was just starting in life as a poet at Racedown; but the greater part of it was written, and written with great labour, in the vale of Grasmere. Even this, however, with all its richness of thought and all its polish, did not realise his conception of what a poem ought to be. The *White Doe of Rylstone* he thought his most perfect work,

and Moore, in his Diary, gives us a characteristic anecdote illustrating Wordsworth's opinion of this poem, and of his general spirit of egotism. Wordsworth happened to be dining with a large and distinguished party at Sir Humphrey Davy's, and all at once, in a momentary pause of conversation, the poet shouted out from the bottom of the table, in his most epic tone, "Davy!" "Yes," answered Sir Humphrey, raising his head in awful expectation of what was coming, "Do you know the reason why I published the *White Doe* in quarto?" "No, what was it?" asked Sir Humphrey. "To show the world my own opinion of it." Nothing at all had apparently been said to lead up to a conversation of this sort, and it ended where it began. But Wordsworth was always thinking of himself, of his mission, and of his works; and of all his works, the *White Doe of Rylstone* took his fancy most. In conception it was, he said, the highest of all his poems, and its workmanship almost equal to its conception. He put his whole soul into it, and wrote and revised it with great labour. Like the rest of his poems, it was composed for the most part in the open air. It was begun in 1807, at Stockton-on-Tees, when the poet was on a visit to his wife's brother. "The country was flat," he says, "and the weather was rough. (It was at the close of the year.) I was accustomed every day to walk to-and-fro under the shelter of a row of stacks, in a field at a small

distance from the town, and there poured forth my verses aloud, as freely as they would come." It was finished in Easedale. To my thinking, it is the most characteristic of all his works, and the one by which posterity will form its final estimate of the genius of Wordsworth.

TOM MOORE.

A YEAR or two before Jeffrey, Brougham, and Sydney Smith met in their garret in Edinburgh to "cultivate literature on a little oatmeal," when the turf was still fresh on the grave of Burns, and when Scott, in his wig and gown, was still sweeping the Hall of the Court of Session in search of briefs that rarely came, or poring over Border ballads in the glens and homesteads of Liddesdale without anything but the haziest conception of the use he was to make of them, a bright-eyed Irish lad of seventeen or eighteen, fresh from the cloisters of Trinity College, turned up in London, arm-in-arm with a tall gaunt companion whom he had met on the top of the coach, in the course of his ride from Holyhead. The Irish lad was a poet, with a complexion like a peach and a voice like a *prima donna*. His companion was a pickpocket; and it was with this gentleman as his companion that Tom Moore took his first stroll along the Strand after dinner to see Temple Bar, and to get a glimpse of the dome of St. Paul's. The pickpocket had hardly a guinea in his purse to pay his share of the hotel bill; and the poet was not very much richer than his companion. All the cash he possessed in the world was about £20,

and this sum in Irish guineas had been sewn up by his mother in the waistband of his pantaloons, with a scapular, a bit of red cloth blessed by a priest, and possessing, in the eyes of a fond superstition, the supernatural power of protecting its wearer from harm. His first and main object in visiting London was to eat his way to the Bar, but at the bottom of his travelling trunk, with his books, lay the MS. of a translation of Anacreon, which he had set his heart upon publishing by hook or by crook, if he could find a printer to take it off his hand upon any terms. "I can scarcely expect more than a free publication," he tells his mother in one of his notes, explaining how he had been killing his spare hours by turning over his MS. to prepare it for publication, "as poems are really, in the present state of the age, a heavy article on the bookseller's hands." His highest hopes did not extend beyond a trifle sufficient to pay his return fare to Dublin.

He took up his quarters in a front room up two pair of stairs, at No. 44, George Street, Portman Square, at a rent of 6s. or 7s. a week, with a nest of French *emigrés*, with whom London was then swarming. The first floor was let to a bishop. A French curé lived with Moore on the second floor. The heads of their beds were *tête à tête*. The poet could hear the priest snore. The priest could hear the poet humming over his Anacreontics at an old piano

morning, noon, and night. But bishop, priest, and poet, all contrived to spend their time in these close quarters very pleasantly. The bishop held a levee every morning. The priest spent all the time he could spare from his breviary, over the newspapers and Johnson's Dictionary. The poet passed his days, and most of his nights, poring over the relics of the Teian bard, with Bayle on one side and Spaletti's *fac simile* of the Vatican MS. on the other. "I find retouching and finishing my Anacreon," he says "to be an increasing and almost endless labour. I am at it night and day;" and it is only necessary to turn to his notes to see at a glance how thoroughly he did his work, testing his translation line by line, and hunting up the works of every critic, and of every rival translator, to clear up any question of the authenticity of a poem, or of the correct rendering of an equivocal phrase. He spent most of his mornings in this way, "reading and scribbling," and after taking a turn in the Park with the priest, or one of the friends whom he had picked up at the Temple, "dined at a *traiteur's* like a prince for 8d. or 9d., upon soup, bouilli, rice pudding, and porter for 9½d." It was a long and laborious work; but with a man of Moore's temperament and taste it was a labour of love. He put his whole heart into it; and forty years after, when he was at the height of his popularity, the author of *Lalla Rookh* often took his sons and his friends to

see the front room up two pair of stairs in George Street, where "the first proof sheet that ever I received was put into my hands by Tom Hume."

That proof formed the groundwork of Moore's fame. The Prince of Wales allowed the Translation to be dedicated to him; and the Odes, when published, were hailed at once as the work of a scholar and a poet. Till then Anacreon had hardly been heard of out of France and Italy, except in the cloisters of Oxford or Trinity College. His Odes were now at the tips of everyone's fingers. They ran through half-a-dozen editions in six weeks, and Moore, like Byron, woke up one morning, with the priest still snoring at the head of his bed, to find himself famous. His popularity, unlike that of most of his contemporaries, knew no dawn and no eclipse.

Perhaps had this translation of Anacreon stood alone, it might have shared the fate of Scott's *Lenora* four or five years previously, and have found its way in the end to the trunkmaker's. But Greek was not the only accomplishment that Tom Moore brought with him from the old library under the shadow of St. Patrick's tower, where the idea of publishing a translation of Anacreon first rose in his mind, and where, with this idea in his head, he picked up much of "that odd, out-of-the-way sort of information which may be found scattered through some of his earliest writings." He could play the

piano and the harpsichord, with a touch of grace and poetry which even the most accomplished masters of his day could not rival. He sang his own native Irish songs like a nightingale; and he was ready at a moment's notice, after supper, to dance down all the girls in a drawing-room. London was not long in discovering these accomplishments in Lady Donegal's sparkling little *protegé;* and although "a contemptuous titter" ran through the group of fine ladies and gentlemen gathered round the piano, when the little Irish lad was led up to the instrument, blushing like a girl, he had hardly run his fingers over the key-board before all the amateurs in the room were whispering in each other's ears that, after all, the son of the Dublin storekeeper was "an Irish pocket-edition of Apollo." His singing, as Coleridge aptly expressed it, was a perfect union of poetry and music, the music, like the honeysuckle around the stem, twining round the meaning and at last overtopping it; and he had hardly been in London a couple of years before his snug little breakfast-table in George Street was every morning littered with invitations to dinners and balls, and with tickets for the opera from half the Peerage. He was the lion of the period; and no *fête* or ball, and very few dinner-parties, were thought to be complete without the Irish Catullus. The Prince Regent asked him to meet Mrs. Fitzherbert and a few of his bosom companions, at one of his supper parties at Carlton House, took him by

the hand when he appeared, and placed him by his side at the head of the table. "Happy to know a man of your abilities, Moore! I am passionately fond of music. I have heard of your abilities in that way; and I hope we shall have many opportunities of enjoying each other's society." Poor Moore, with his bashfulness, almost lost his head under this flattery. But the second or third draught cooled him; and we soon find him taking his ease in the library and drawing-room at Donnington, as a guest of Lord Moira's, with as much coolness and bouyancy as if he had been cradled in a castle. "I rise early, breakfast heartily, employ the day in walking or hunting among old books, dine off two courses, never less, in the evening sing down the sun like a Pythagorean, and then sensibly take to my pillow where I sleep sweetly, nor dream of ambition though beneath the roof of an Earl." Thus, in less than a couple of years after his stroll along the Strand, arm in arm with a pickpocket, the son of a second-rate Dublin tradesman was walking along Pall Mall arm in arm with privy councillors, hobnobbing with earls, the boon companion of princes and statesmen; and the songs which he had been in the habit of singing after supper to his own accompaniment upon a second-hand piano, taken in exchange for a bad debt, in "the little drawing-room over the shop in Aungier Street," in order to divert a group of linendraper's assistants and barmaids, were to be heard echoing

through the gilded saloons of Piccadilly and Berkeley Square to the applause of all the graces of Almack's.

Tom Moore was the first of modern poets to wed music with song; and it was this union of poetry and music which won for him, at the outset of his career, that popularity which every one of his contemporaries, except Byron and Scott, had to wait for with sickening hearts till even popularity had lost the bloom and lustre which generally distinguish it in the eyes of virgin genius. Sir Walter Scott hardly knew high from low in music. Burns and Byron did not know even this. Crabbe could hardly distinguish a sheet of music from a sheet of Chaldee. Shelley possessed perhaps a finer poetical ear than any of his contemporaries, finer even than Wordsworth. But even Shelley, like Wordsworth, had not a note of music in his soul. He could not whistle an *Io Triomphe* over his wife without all his friends laughing at him; and the highest musical accomplishment he ever attained was to play an Italian air, with one hand, upon the piano. But Moore, like Milton, possessed, and possessed in a high degree, the musical as well as the poetical ear; and unlike all his rivals, drew most of his inspiration from music. It was, he used to say, the only art for which he was born with a real natural talent; and his poetry, such as it was, all sprang out of his deep feeling for music. What Love was to Burns, what Nature was to Wordsworth, what Passion was to Byron, what Tra-

dition and all the associations of Border chivalry were to Scott, Music was to Moore. It was the source of all his inspiration; and most of his poetry, according to his own account, arose out of his effort to translate into words the different feelings and passions which melody seemed to him to express.

This union of a taste for music with a genius for poetry, was the distinguishing characteristic of Moore; and it was at the piano, warbling his own songs, that the author of the *Irish Melodies* ought to be seen to be seen at his best; to be seen, that is, in his moments of highest exaltation. He put his whole soul into these songs, and generally had two or three pair of bright eyes weeping around him before he had been at the piano for ten minutes. Of course those who have not been under the wand of the enchanter can form but a very poor impression of the potency of his spells. But the spells of Moore must have been potent indeed to bring tears into the eyes of the Pluto of the *Edinburgh Review*, and to lead an English Sheriff in a burst of pathos to exempt the songster from the Militia. And yet Moore achieved both these triumphs of Art over Nature. He brought tears into Jeffrey's eyes, much as he professed to dislike music, by singing, "There's a song of the olden time;" and the High Sheriff of Derbyshire, after listening to one of his songs at a *fête* at Ashbourne, burst out with an eloquent expletive which I need not repeat, by promising to

exempt him from the Militia. But with Moore singing was hardly an art. It ought rather apparently to be called the highest expression of Nature; for, in breaking the hearts of his hearers with his songs, Moore generally broke his own, singing his pieces at the rate of a dozen an hour, till most of the girls around the piano had disappeared to "hide their emotions on the stairs," and till the poet brought this comedietta of emotion to an end by bursting into hysterics with the melancholy of his own voice. This happened so frequently that Moore found it convenient to plead the state of his nerves as a reason why he should be off the instant he saw his hostess looking up her music; and in reading through his diary, many instances turn up where he asks for a few moments' grace from a brace of countesses imploring him to sing, and uses his respite to escape in the first cabriolet that is to be found at the door. Nor was there anything like affectation about this; for Moore was one of the openest of men, and he may fairly ask to be taken at his word when he tells us, without the slightest reserve through his Diary, that no one had any conception of how he was affected by his own singing, partly from being touched himself, and partly from his anxiety to touch others. The sparkle and pathos of his style were proverbs; and Lady Cochrane probably expressed the secret feeling of half her sex when she said that to hear Moore sing she would at any time walk ten miles.

"What a lucky fellow you are!" said the author of the *Pleasures of Memory* to him one evening, as they were returning from a party where Moore had left a bevy of high-born dames, with their hearts in their throats. "Surely you must have been born with a rose in your lips, and a nightingale singing on the top of your bed." Yet, except at the piano, Moore was almost helpless. He hardly ever sang, or attempted to sing, even a convivial song at a dinner-table but to his own accompaniment. At the piano, and at the piano alone, he was at home, and with this to run to he often sang his melodies till he was as hoarse as a crow. It is not too much, indeed, to say that many of these airs owed all their popularity to his own voice. He sang them into popularity; and often broke into the work he had on hand, to run up to town to spend a month in the dissipation of drawing-rooms, to puff a few songs that were hanging on his publisher's hands. This at least was his excuse to Bessie and his publisher, and in their eyes at all events it was enough to silence every other objection. Perhaps no English poet but Moore could have done anything but ruin his best poems by attempting to sing them. Moore often sang the worst of his into a second edition.

It was through these songs, and especially through his own singing of them, that Moore won his first flush of popularity; and on his return from his trip to America and the West Indies, with a pile of MSS.

of all sorts in his portmanteau, his rooms in Bury Street swarmed for days with editors of the Keepsakes and Annuals which were then the fashionable form of literature, and with publishers from Albemarle Street and Paternoster Row, offering him a guinea a line for anything he chose to write,—five-and-twenty guineas for a song,—a thousand guineas for a poem. "If I could do half the things that I am importuned to do," he tells his mother, "I should rival even Mrs. Malaprop's Cerebus, three single gentlemen rolled into one." It was in these rooms in Bury Street that he wrote many of his Odes and Epistles from America, and most of Little's Poems, working all the mornings "as hard as a Scaliger." His quarters here, as in George Street, were on the second floor; and if there is a house at the West End which ought to be marked with a bit of chalk it is this—No. 28, Bury Street; for here Moore lived on and off for ten years—here he had the first serious illness of his life—here Lord Strangford wrote Camöens when Moore was correcting the proofs of the volume which led to his duel with Jeffrey;—and here Moore, in a conversation with Rogers, struck out his first conception of *Lalla Rookh*. Some of the most piquant and interesting of Moore's reminiscences were associated with these rooms. He hardly ever passed the door without running up to take a peep at his old quarters, and he and the Author of Camöens often drew their chairs together at Brookes's after

dinner to chat about old times, about the times when they were gay young gentlemen (and both almost equally penniless) about town, and their Publisher was cheating them both out of the profits of their first poetical vagaries. "The price of a horse, £30, which Carpenter advanced, the horse falling lame at the same time, was all that Strangford got from him for his Camöens, and my 'Little' account was despatched in pretty much the same manner. I remember (Moore adds,) as vividly almost as if it took place but yesterday, Carpenter coming to my bedroom about noon one day (some ball having kept me up late the night before) and telling me that, on looking over my account with him, he found the balance against me to be about £60. Such a sum was, to me at that time, almost beyond counting. I instantly started up from my pillow, exclaiming: 'What *is* to be done?' when he said very kindly that if I would make over to him the copyright of Little's Poems (then in their first flush of success) he would cancel the whole account. 'My dear fellow,' I exclaimed, 'most willingly, and thanks for the relief you have given me!' I cannot take upon myself now to say how much this made the whole amount I received for the work; but something very trifling, and Carpenter himself told a friend of mine some years after, that he was in receipt of £200 a year from the sale of that volume."

Of course this sort of life was utterly inconsistent

vith anything like systematic work; and Moore, with ll his genius, could work well only when working ystematically and in seclusion. He could never sit lown at his desk, as Byron did on returning home rom a lobster supper with Sheridan and Rogers, or rom Almack's, and throw off a poem like *Lara* or he *Corsair;* send the MS. to the printer, with the nk hardly dry, and publish it, with only a couple of ıours for revision. He could never write, except ıfter the most laborious preparation; and Moore, after Macaulay, was, perhaps, the most thorough workman hen to be found in the ranks of literature. But Moore had one fault. He was apt to be finical. He ould do nothing, or next to nothing, off hand; and ıe *would* do nothing on compulsion. "I am not loing much"—sentences of this sort often crop up n his correspondence—even when he is in straits or a £10 note to pay his tailor, or to run over to Dublin, and when he might make ten times the ıum in two or three days by taking up his pen,—'I am not doing much; and, indeed, the downright ıecessity which I feel of doing something is one of he great reasons why I do almost nothing. These hings should come of their own accord. I hate to nake a conscript of my muse." He hired a bed-oom two miles out of town to fly to now and then or a morning's work. But with his time broken up nto fragments, as it was by the life he led in London, t was impossible for a man of his habits of work,

even with this resort at hand, to take any task in hand by which he could hope to hold his own against contemporaries like Scott and Byron. Murray offered him 2,000 guineas for a poem, without even asking to look at a line of the MS. beforehand; and the Longmans capped this with an offer through Perry, the Editor of the *Morning Chronicle*, of 3,000. This was the highest price that had then been paid for a work of this description; and the Longmans hesitated at first to offer it to a man who had done little more than write a volume of songs and idylls, without stipulating for a perusal of the MS. beforehand. But this Perry and Moore refused point blank. "I shall have no ifs," said Moore. "Murray's £2,000 without this distrustful stipulation is better than the £3,000 with it." And he carried his point. The Longmans gave way; and the agreement was drawn up in the simplest form, merely stipulating that upon Moore giving into their hands a poem as long as *Rokeby* he should receive the sum of £3,000. The date of this contract was Dec. 17, 1814; and at that time not a line of *Lalla Rookh*, as it now stands, had been written. Perhaps the plan of it had been sketched out; for in Moore's Diary and Correspondence a stray hint here and there is thrown out to show that he had been turning over in his mind Rogers' suggestion—that he should try his hand at a poem of those quarto dimensions which Scott's late triumphs in that form had

rendered the regular poetical standard, and that the romance of *Lalla Rookh* was floating hazily in his imagination. This offer of the Longmans fixed him; and, binding himself to their service with this splendid retainer,* and with an allowance of £500 a year from the Powers for his songs, Moore retired, with his wife, to a cottage just outside the park of Donnington Castle, to read up for the scenery and costumes of his work, intending for the future to live by the earnings of his pen, without dreaming of the patronage of Lord Moira, or of any of the rest of his "ornamental friends," and promising himself, with his cottage, his wife, and his poem, as much happiness as Love, Literature, and Liberty could confer upon a man. Of course the main attraction of Donnington was the splendid library at the Hall; and in this library Moore passed all the leisure hours of a year or eighteen months, poring over *D'Herbelot*, and every volume of Greek and Persian literature and travel that was to be found within its four walls, in order to form "a store-house of illustration purely Oriental, and so familiarise himself with its various treasures, that as quick as Fancy, in her airy spiritings, required the assistance of fact, the Memory should be ready, like another Ariel, at her strong bidding, to furnish the materials for the spell-work." This was his chief work here, and almost all that he wrote was a few of his Melodies to keep Power quiet,

* "I never could work without a retainer."

and a squib now and then to throw into the Two-penny Post-Bag—a collection of squibs upon topics of the hour—planned and published "to get out of Carpenter's debt, and to put a little money into his pocket." Of *Lalla Rookh* itself very little was written here, although probably the groundwork of most of it was laid out in his imagination in the course of his pleasant strolls by moonlight

"On Donnington's green lawns and breezy heights."

He put off this part of his task till he could find a quiet little writing-box, where he might throw his heart and soul into his work without risk of interruption from the host of visitors who were in the habit, every now and then, of breaking in upon him at Donnington.

This writing-box Moore found in a cottage in one of the pleasantest and most romantic valleys of the Peak; and in this cottage he spent four or five of the busiest and happiest years of his life. One must have an imagination almost equal to Moore's to associate the oriental scenes of *Lalla Rookh* with the solitary and bleak-looking hut which now represents "Tom Moore's Cottage." It can, as it now stands, be nothing more, of course, than the ghost of what it was in Moore's days; for Moore, a connoisseur in cottages, was in raptures with it,—thought it impossible to find a more rural or secluded corner

to court the Muses, and talked of keeping it on as a scribbling-retreat, even if his prospects, after the publication of *Lalla Rookh*, should induce him to take up his quarters in London. Rogers thought it a delightful spot, even after Chatsworth; and upon its terraces Sir John Stevenson composed two or three of his sweetest airs. The cottage stood, as it still stands, in the fields, by itself, on an elevated plateau about a mile and a half from Ashbourne, and except with a telescope Moore could see nothing like a habitation from his desk in his sunny study but the tower of the village church, overgrown with lichens, about half a mile off among the trees. "I have never yet been in a situation so retired and suited to business . . . . and I think I shall live in it for ever if something better than ordinary does not turn up for me." He was almost as far from a lemon at Mayfield as Sydney Smith was in his Yorkshire Vicarage; and dining out in Derbyshire then meant with Moore pretty much what it did with the Vicar of Foxton. "I am in a desert; and if I go out to dinner the dulness of the good people is like suffocation. I can hardly draw breath under it." Yet to Moore, with his visions of the Veiled Prophet and his fairies, this desert was a paradise; and his life there reads like a prose idyll. He was up with the lark. He breakfasted at eight o'clock, and was out in the fields with his note-book and pencil in his hand, or at his desk in his study, by nine o'clock.

The fields formed his favourite study; and in these he passed most of the long summer days. After dinner he took up a volume of Scott or of Miss Edgeworth, and read for a couple of hours to his wife, turning into his study again after tea for three or four hours. Yet even, living in this seclusion, and after all his preparation, Moore thought a dozen lines a day quick work. His usual rate was ten; and at this rate the greater part of this masterpiece of his genius was written. Hundreds of lines, even after they had been composed at this rate, were thrown aside; and the plan of the poem was altered time after time, first at Rogers' suggestion, and then at his own caprice, or at the suggestion of a visitor to whom he had read a few of his pages over his cottage fire. One of these abandoned stories, the *Peri's Daughter*, was meant to relate the loves of a nymph of ærial extraction with a youth of mortal race, the rightful Prince of Oranez, who had been from his infancy brought up in seclusion on the banks of the river Amon by an aged guardian named Mohassan; and in his Preface Moore gives us two or three fragments from this torso, which Lord Russell might, without impropriety, have lengthened in his life of the poet. In none of these fragments, except, perhaps, the tale of the *Peri's Daughter*, had Moore as yet ventured to invoke what he calls the most home-felt of all his inspirations, that which has lent to the story of the *Fire Worshippers* its main attrac-

tion and interest; and even in the *Peri's Daughter* there is but a vague and shadowy hint of an intention to give this turn to his romance in two or three prophetic words thrown probably, after all, at random, without any distinct conception of their hidden and prophetic meaning. "And this was the reason, doubtless," he says in his Preface, "though hardly known at the time to myself, that, finding my subjects so slow in kindling my own sympathies, I began to despair of their ever touching the hearts of others, and felt often inclined to say—

> "'Oh, no! I have no voice or hand
> For such a song in such a land.'"

He threw aside fragment after fragment, like the Tale of Cambuscan, left half told. At last, however, he struck the true note of his lyre. In a moment of happy inspiration, the thought occurred to him of founding a story on the fierce struggle so long maintained between the Ghebers, or ancient Fire Worshippers of Persia, and their haughty Moslem masters. "From that moment a new and deep interest in my whole task took possession of me. The cause of tolerance was again my inspiring theme; and the spirit that had spoken in the Melodies of Ireland soon found itself at home in the East." He put his whole heart and industry into the poem, feeling that upon this effort of his genius must depend, in the long run, the position he

was to take in the ranks of literature; and although we find him even now often anticipating the development of his story by writing songs, without the slightest notion apparently how the property of them was to be managed, the whole course of the romance after this wrought itself out day by day in the form in which it now stands; every line was conned over with the most critical care, and into every line of the poem he threw "as much mind and polish as he was master of." The closing parts alone were written with anything like haste, and these were written, not in Dovedale with the nightingale singing under the bushes, but in a cottage at Hornsey, with the printer's devil at his door with a packet of proofs, and waiting for copy; for anticipating the finish of the poem, the publishers had announced the date of its publication when Moore had still 1200 or 1500 lines to write or polish off, and when apparently he had still but a very hazy notion as to how the climax of the romance was to be wrought out. This, of course, put Moore on his mettle. At first he proposed to alter the date. But this the publishers at once pronounced impossible. This was on the 13th of May; and the publishers had promised the poem by the 22nd. To Moore of course this was agony. But by the use of "whip and spur," by correcting proofs with one hand and by writing couplets with the other, with blanks still left for the adjectives, or with alternative words marked in the margin for reconsidera-

tion, he reached the goal after all. His last copy was delivered into the printer's hands on Saturday, and three days after *Lalla Rookh* was on all the drawing-room tables in London. On the 30th of May it was in a second edition, and Moore's conscience, as to the publisher's pockets at least, was quite at rest.

The popularity of *Lalla Rookh* was unbounded. It put everything else to the blush, even the masterpieces of the brilliant group of poets whom Leigh Hunt, in his feast of the poets, had invited to dine with Apollo,—Byron, Scott, Campbell, and Southey. The poem ran through edition after edition, each costlier and more luxurious than the last. It was translated in a few months into half the languages of Europe; into French, Italian, German, Romaic. It was read everywhere, in palaces on the banks of the Vistula and the Seine, in log wood huts on the banks of the Ohio and the Caspian, and it was read everywhere with admiration and delight, by the sparkling eyes of the graces of Almacks, and by the dusky beauties of the bungaloes of Bombay. Princesses slept with it under their pillows. Every woman of fashion in Paris knew it by heart. At Berlin nothing was talked of under the lindens or in the boudoir for months but *Lalla Rookh*; and at one of the most brilliant *fêtes* that had ever been held in the court of the Hohenzollerns, the poem was acted in character by the ladies and gentlemen of the court, with royal dukes and grand duchesses in the principal parts.

The Grand Duchess of Russia always carried a couple of copies of the poem about with her, splendidly bound and studded with precious stones; and the author could flatter his muse for years with the thought that his romance was lying on half the drawing-room tables of all the centres of fashion, bound in green velvet, with clasps of gold, and studded with coronets of diamonds. The echoes of its fame reached him from all quarters. He met a friend in the Strand returning from India, and his first salute took the form of a congratulation on the success of *Lalla Rookh*. "You ought to be the happiest dog alive. I saw your book all along the road from Cairo to Calais." He met a free lance at Brookes's, who had been fighting for Greek independence. "Ah, your book is a greater traveller than you. I had to spend two or three hours in a hut on the shores of the Caspian, and a Persian put a copy of *Lalla Rookh* into my hands to kill the time." Visiting Paris he went to a ball at the Palais Royal, and all through the evening a little Russian Prince came sidling up to him every quarter of an hour with a line or two from the poem. He met the Persian ambassador at a ball in London, and he, like all the rest, was ready with his compliments. His songs were sung everywhere in the land of the Sun; and the Persian poets themselves insisted that the best of them particularly that about Bendameer's stream, must have been taken originally from some Persian MS.

Anglo-Indians, who had passed half their lives in Lahore or Orissa, were perplexed to find such a vivid sketch of the costume and scenery of the East in a poem written in a Derbyshire village. Colonel Wilks, the historian of British India, put Sir James Mackintosh through a sharp cross-examination on his arrival in India, to find out whether Moore had or had not crossed the Oxus to colour his descriptions of the Vale of Cashmere, and made up his mind in the end, that reading over D'Herbelot was, after all, quite as good as riding on the back of a camel. The Moonshees themselves were astonished at the accuracy of the costume of the poem, and acknowledged, with Rogers, that Moore's garments could not have been more fragrant if he had spent all his life in a cinnamon grove.

This feat of Tom Moore's is, I believe, the highest triumph ever achieved by the Imagination; and the congratulations which it brought to the poet from men like Sir Gore Ouseley and Colonel Wilks, from men, that is, who knew the Vale of Cashmere, with all its scenery and customs, as well as they knew those of the Vale of the White Horse, must have been all the more agreeable, because to him they were testimonies at once to his genius and to his industry; for, as he says in his diary, all the customs and all the scenery sketched in *Lalla Rookh*, and every flower from which he drew an illustration, were inquired into by him beforehand with the utmost industry and

precision. To test the accuracy of a single touch in his poem, he did not hesitate to ransack a library; and he made it a point of honour to hunt up every book, in every language, that could throw the slightest additional light upon any part of his subject that was open to criticism. This was Moore's habit all through his life; and it was in working up hints and observations gathered in this way that he wrought his best work. Lord Byron could only describe what he had seen; and his descriptions even of what he had seen were generally thrown off on the spot, at a roadside inn, or at least within a day or two after, when the scene was still fresh in his recollection. His description of Rome, one of the most vivid and powerful sketches in the English language, was written in the main from the hints of his companion Hobhouse, for he felt but very little admiration for Rome at the first glance, and asked Hobhouse in despair at the end of the day—"What shall I write about?" Hobhouse drew up the heads of the Roman Canto of Childe Harold for Byron to fill in. There is not, I believe, in all Byron's works a single picture drawn from the imagination alone. And this, too, was the case with Goethe. His description of the Carnival at Rome, a fit companion picture for Byron's canto, and one of the brightest gems of Goethe's genius, was based upon the observations which the poet made from his own window on the Corso during the Carnival, and afterwards threw together with very

little addition from fancy. But Moore's imagination, like Scott's, was clairvoyant, and pictured more vividly scenes thrown upon it by a process of refraction than it did scenes which had passed directly under his own eye, although, like Scott, Moore never trusted to imagination alone for the most trifling touch in his description, even to the colour of a flower. His imagination was generally chilled by the scene itself; and thus *Lalla Rookh,* like all the rest of Moore's works, was founded, as he used to boast, upon a long and laborious collection of the minutest facts. They were works of fiction only in their form.

He saw at a glance how a poem, or a life, or a squib ought to be written, how it must be written to be written as it ought to be; but after sketching it in outline, he complains again and again of the difficulty, sometimes of the impossiblity, of realising his own conception. He abandons his first sketch, or emodels it, or tries a different tack, and generally sets to work after all in a spirit of sheer despair, and publishes at haphazard. This was the case more or less with all his works, except perhaps those sparkling trifles which he threw off in the garden of his Wiltshire cottage for the *Times* or the *Examiner* upon the current topics of the day. These were generally written under the inspiration of the moment, like many of his *Irish Melodies,* in a turn or two along his garden walk, now and then in the corner of the stage-coach, often in the course of a stroll from

Sloperton to Bowood or Bath; for every newspaper he took up to read, started a crowd of whimsical thoughts and jokes, which, till some of them were laid with his pen, were apt to haunt and tease him, to use his own illustration, as the little devils did St. Anthony. But even upon these trifles Moore frequently bestowed far more thought and pains than a man of off-hand and dashing genius like Scott did upon his finest work. He tells Power, for instance, how in composing one of his Sacred Songs he had "worked at a single verse all the morning in order to get in a line which he wished to make the burden of every verse;" and in sending a fresh reading of a couple of halting lines, he adds—"This passage has bothered me more than enough." His correspondence abounds with instances of this kind. The Ode to the Goddess Ceres was written in walking to Bath; and the Song of Love and Hope, and the ballad, "How happy once, though winged with sighs," in a post-chaise on the road to London, the words and the music as well. "In fact," he says, "I sang them all the way." But these are rare instances. Most of his songs were puzzled out line by line. "At last," for instance, he says, in sending the MS. of 'Tis Gone, and for Ever,' "after several days' twisting and turning, I have licked this young bear into shape, and a promising cub I am sure you will think it." "You will hardly believe," he says in another note, "that the two lines which I

had with many hours of thought and glove-tearing proposed to insert in the vacant places (of a poem then in the printer's hands) displeased me so much when I read them down yesterday, that I am still at work for better. Such is the easy pastime of poetry!" But perhaps the most striking example of the way in which the plan of a poem often flashed upon his mind, and of the slow and critical spirit in which he sat down at his desk to work out his conception, is the case of the *Epicurean*. The plan of this romance is sketched out in his diary, just as it arose in his mind; and the plan is worth reproducing, in order to compare it with the finished work. The date is "Paris, July 25, 1820."

"Began my Egyptian poem, and wrote about thirteen or fourteen lines of it. The story to be told in letters from a young Epicurean philosopher, who, in the second century of the Christian era, goes to Egypt for the purpose of discovering the elixir of immortality, which is supposed to be one of the secrets of the Egyptian priests. During a festival on the Nile, he meets with a beautiful maiden, the daughter of one of the priests, lately dead. She enters the catacombs, and disappears. He hovers around the spot, and at last finds the well and secret passages, &c., by which those who are initiated enter. He sees this maiden in one of those theatrical spectacles which formed a part of the subterranean Elysium of the Pyramids—finds opportunities of

conversing with her—their intercourse in this mysterious region described. They are discovered; and he is thrown into those subterranean prisons where they who violate the rules of initiation are confined. He is liberated from thence by the young maiden, and, taking flight together, they reach some beautiful region, where they linger for a time delighted, and she is near becoming a victim to his arts. But, taking alarm, she flies, and seeks refuge with a Christian monk in the Thebaid, to whom her mother, who was secretly a Christian, had consigned her in dying. The struggles of her love with her religion. A persecution of the Christians takes place, and she is seized (chiefly through the unintentional mears of her lover,) and suffers martyrdom. The scene of her martyrdom described, in a letter from the solitary of the Thebaid, and the attempt made by the young philosopher to rescue her. He is carried off from thence to the cell of the solitary. His letters from that retreat, after he has become a Christian, devoting his thoughts entirely to repentance and the recollection of the beloved saint who had gone before him.—If I don't make something out of all this, the deuce is in't."

He kept to this plan for three or four days, and all that was written in pursuance of it is reprinted in the last edition of his works. But he had hardly got through 200 or 300 lines when he altered his plan, determined, instead of making it poetry, to

make it prose, and then began to hunt up all the old bookstalls and libraries of Paris for works upon Egyptian antiquities, Egyptian customs, and Egyptian scenery. To spell through these was of course the work of months; but Moore, with all his flightiness and dissipation, never scamped a task of this sort. His course of reading for the *Epicurean* may be traced out with the utmost precision, and its amplitude and variety are at the first blush startling to those who hold the pleasant theory that poetry is the spontaneous expression of an effervescent fancy, needing no more culture than a rich soil. His first set of books comprised Maillet's *Description of Egypt,* Abdallatif's *Relation d'Egypt,* Quatremère's *Memoire* and *Fables Egyptiennes,* and De Pauw. To go through and digest these works would in itself be enough to take the poetry out of most men. But with Moore this set of works formed only the first course of his Egyptian banquet. *Sethos* and Chateaubriand's *Martyrs* were, after these, merely literary truffles; and when Moore had trifled with these for a few days, and altered his plan once or twice, to keep clear of Chateaubriand, whose path he found himself crossing here and there, he read the *History of the Jews* to pick up a few hints about the cabalistical theology, which they are supposed to have borrowed from the Egyptians; Sonnini, to post himself up in the seeds and flowers of Egypt; Regnier to form a vivid conception of the military life

of the Egyptians; and the Memoires of Andreossy and of two or three explorers of the Nile for a few touches of nature which might possibly have been overlooked by professional and literary critics visiting the home of the Pharaohs to "make a book." And all this for a light-o'-love story, which you may take up and run through in two or three hours! Yet with Moore this preparatory reading was a mere matter of course, and, except in a case like this of the *Epicurean*, you can only track his course with a microscope. He makes no fuss about his reading, about its extent or its variety, and only mentions the books he happens to be reading when at work on a romance, to account for his time in his Diary. The truth is, Moore had such a love of facts, such a love of accuracy, such an aversion to hasty and slipslop work, that he never thought of taking up his pen to write, and perhaps, with all his imagination and fancy, could not write till he had formed as comprehensive, as accurate, and as vivid a conception of the scenery and of the habits and associations of the people whom he had in his eye, as it was possible to form from the books within his reach. This passion for facts, this love of accuracy, this hypercritical care, is as distinguishable in the trifles of his genius as it is in his masterpieces. What he did in the case of the *Epicurean*, he did in the case of his *Epitaph upon a Tuft Hunter*. What he did in the case of *Lalla Rookh*, he did in his *Irish History*. It was his habit.

He trusted for nothing to his imagination that he could verify by inquiry; and thus we find him one day with the MS. of his *Tuft Hunter* in his hand, spending half a morning in the library of Holland House, consulting books on heraldry to ascertain the exact number of pearls in different coronets, and the next day hunting among the bookstalls of Drury Lane and Holborn for a Slang Dictionary, or dining with Jackson, the boxer, to pick up the flash of the Prize Ring for one of his political squibs—one day poking among the folios of the British Museum till the room turned round with him; the next, burrowing like a mole among the MSS. of the Record Office to clear up some apparently trifling point about the customs of the Irish in the seventh century. It was this system of hard reading carried on month after month and year after year for his *Irish History,* when his spirit was broken by a long and sad series of domestic bereavements, and when, with all this load of sorrow weighing him down, he felt it necessary to work to keep the wolf from the door, that in the end killed him. Sir Walter Scott threw off his companion volume of the *History of Scotland* in six weeks, inventing his facts, like Voltaire, as he went along, and sending the MS. to Dr. Lardner, without even correcting his slips of the pen, and asking the Editor just to "throw in a few dates and authorities" to distinguish the work from the *Antiquary.* Moore took two or three years over his volumes, re-wrote

chapter after chapter over and over again, and spent week after week in routing away among the folios of the British Museum, and in spelling out MSS. in the State Paper Office which even Hume had refused to touch with a pair of tongs, on the quaint plea, for an historian, that if he once began to read MSS. of this sort, his work, instead of being kept within eight vols. might run to eighty. Moore's cottage during the time that this History was on hand, was more like the lair of an antiquarian than the home of a poet distinguished above all his contemporaries, as the critics were then saying all round, by the delicacy of his *tournure,* the music of his versification, and the fancy of his thought.

Yet with these habits of hard reading, of close and persistent study, Tom Moore was, in his habits of composition, a poet to the tips of his fingers. Almost everything that Moore wrote was thought out, like most of Wordsworth's poems, in the open air, either in the fields or in his garden. He could not work in the atmosphere of London; and even when visiting London to see one of his works through the press, we find him stuffing his pocket with proofs and starting off to Kensington Gardens, before the dew is off the grass, to spend a long morning, sauntering about under the chesnuts and elms, conning over his couplets, and touching up his thoughts, and returning to his rooms after three or four hour's work of this kind with several of his scenes recast, to finish

up the day with a dinner at Barnes's in Blackfriars, or with Lord John Russell in Belgravia. This was how the death scene in the *Epicurean* was polished off so superbly. This scene in its original form was, according to his own account, a very crude sketch, and when Moore looked it through in the proof after breakfast, he was out of all conceit with it. It wanted correcting all through. But with visitors by the dozen gathering upon his doorstep—and this was generally the case with him in London—he could do nothing; and the scene as it now stands, one of the most pathetic and finished bits of Moore's writing, was the result of three hours close work on the turf at Kensington Gardens one fine morning, before the stream of visitors had found its way as far as Hyde Park Corner. He was as fond of the open air as Shelley; and the fields were always the scene of his best work. The trees are still shown in Bermuda and on the banks of Lake Ontario, where he wrote many of his earliest songs; and till Von Moltke and his artillerists ravished the heights of Meudon and St. Cloud with their Krupp guns, you could still trace the path of Moore from his cottage on the outskirts of Sèvres, to the favourite haunt of his muse in the Jardin Marbœuf, as plainly as you can trace the haunts of Wordsworth on the slopes of Rydal Mount. His cottage faced you as you passed over the bridge at Sèvres—I must, I suppose, speak of it in the past tense—and took in the splendid sweep of woodland scenery and palaces, which is

now represented by a few mounds of ruins of less interest than those of Baalbec. Close by the cottage stood an exquisite miniature pavilion, and here Moore passed most of his mornings, "quietly and independently," at his desk, copying out his rough drafts or correcting his proofs. The walks through the woods of Meudon and St. Cloud formed his study, as the woods of Ravenna did Byron's. "They are of the true kind for study," says Moore in one of his memorandums, "and I enjoy myself so thoroughly here, that if the sun would but go on shining all the year, and the flowers blooming, and the nightingales singing, I should do nothing but sing and dream like the birds themselves all the year round." It was here that the *Epicurean*, most of the *Loves of the Angels*, and the whole of the *Fudge Papers* were thought out line by line, and written at the rate generally of fifteen or twenty lines a day, or perhaps now and then, when he happened to be in a particularly industrious cue, of twenty-five or thirty; but this was not often, although, as a matter of fact, I believe Moore took less time to write the *Epicurean*, the *Loves of the Angels*, and the *Fudge Papers*, than he had taken, in the first flush of his inspiration, to write *Lalla Rookh*. Now and then he contrives to get through 600 lines in three weeks; but this is sharp work for Moore—"very little else than scribble, scribble"—and except when alone, he thought fifty lines a week fair average work. In Paris, how-

ever, these intervals of seclusion and close work were very few and far between; for generally here, as in London, Moore frittered away his time and his thoughts upon dinners, and balls, and wine parties to such an extent that, as he tells us in his Diary, his wife thought it a red-letter day when she had him all to herself from breakfast to supper. The entry in which this fact is noted is too characteristic, as an illustration of the sort of life that Moore led in Paris, when he was writing his *Loves of the Angels,* to pass over. It is very simple but very suggestive—

"We dined at home with our little ones for the first time since the 1st of July. [The date of this entry is October.] *It was a great treat to both of us,* and Bessy said on going to bed, 'This is the first rational day we have had for a long time.'"

He was habitually besieged by hosts of visitors, and spent every evening of the week, Sunday and all, at the opera or the theatre, dining out with English friends or at Verry's, and rounding off the day with a ball or *soirée.* Yet notwithstanding "all this abominable and frivolous dissipation," Moore contrives week by week to turn out his tale of bricks, at the rate of 50, 60, or 70 lines a week, and most of them, as he occasionally flatters himself, "not bad, at least so I think now, although what they may appear on cooler revisal is another thing." Now and then he turns out 100 lines in the week, occasionally 150. But this was very rarely; and the printer

was generally close at his heels. Once when he found himself more than ordinarily behindhand with his copy, he hit upon the Grub Sreet device of lying in bed and working out his thoughts between the sheets, in order to be out of the way of callers, and to get an hour or two of uninterrupted thought. Adopted originally from social necessity, Moore afterwards continued this practice as a species of intellectual luxury, entertaining a notion that he wrote freer in this position than he did at his desk; and he flattered himself with the thought that he had discovered in a Latin poem of M. de Valois high authority for this practice—

> "Quis nescit quondam, Ausoniæs Graiosque portas, &c.,
> In lectis cum seriniolo studuisse redentes."

"It is singular," he says, "the difference that bed makes, not only in the facility but the fancy of what I write. Whether it be the horizontal position (which Richeraud, the French physiologist, says is the most favourable to thought) or more probably the removal of all those external objects that divert the attention, it is certain the effect is always the same, and if I did not find that it relaxed me exceedingly, I should pass half my days in bed for the purpose of composition." Most of *Tom Cribb's Memorials,* and the closing part of the *Fudge Family in Italy,* were written in this fashion.

But this habit, a habit which Sir Walter Scott

abhorred, but which Sheridan, like Moore, vindicated by a couple of illustrious examples—

> "Lucifer Herodotum vidit vesperque cubantem
> Desedit totos hæc Plato Sæpe dies—"

Moore abandoned at once upon his resettlment at Sloperton; and here we find him returning to his pleasanter, healthier, and, I may add, more poetical custom of making the green fields and his garden his study, as he did in his early days at Doddington and at Mayfield. Here he often sat in the garden from breakfast till dinner-time, with his books and papers around him; and in the garden of his picturesque little cottage on the Wiltshire Downs, the *Life of Sheridan*, the *Life of Byron*, and his pathetic and courageous sketch of Lord Edward Fitzgerald were written, as well as his Irish History, most of his squibs for the *Times*, and many of his raciest songs. "I have my chair and my MS. book in the garden, and stay out whole hours;" and frequently in his diary you come across the record of a busy day spent sauntering about "in the sweet sunshine all the day, stringing together a few, very few, sentences of an Irish Melody." In contradistinction to Burns, the spring and summer were Moore's special seasons of inspiration, and contrasting the genial current of his thought in summer, with its sluggishness in the autumn and winter, he used to say that the warm sunshine of southern France would suit him exactly—perhaps

keep him in song all the year round. June put him into raptures; and he grudged every hour taken from poetry by prose on a fine summer day, always entering it down in his diary as a day lost. "It seems profanation to write such buffoonery," he says, when at work upon his flash epistles, "in the midst of this glorious sunshine. But, alas! money must be had, and these trifles bring it in fastest and easiest."

"In the garden all day: delicious weather. At my Sheridan task from 10 till 3. . . . . This would have been a day for poetry, not tame, dull, business-like prose; and yet thus have I lost all this most poetical summer."

"Pursued my task all day in the garden."

"True cottage days, tranquil and industrious."

Tranquil and industrious! Those two words very aptly picture the whole tenor of his life at Sloperton; for it was a life varied by little else than visits to Bowood, to Colonel Napier to look over his MS. of the Peninsular War, to the quiet parsonage of Bowles the poet, or to Bath to see his daughter at school, or to look through the files of the *Bath Chronicle* to touch up his life of Sheridan. His main work here was history and biography, varied now and then by a dash into poetry, or by a work like that masterpiece of pleasantry and perspicuity, *Captain Rock,* his squibs for the *Times* and *Morning Chronicle,* and now and then by an Irish Melody and an article for the *Edinburgh Review.* Yet even here, with all this

tranquillity, Moore complains again and again of his want of fluency in composition. Hardly anything that he wrote, even in prose, much less in verse, ever came up to his conception of what it ought to be, and in prose as in verse he is always twitting himself with his inaptitude to do justice to his own thoughts. "I have done it, and done it, I think, pretty well; but, as usual, not half so well as I had pre-imagined." This is his verdict upon the *Loves of the Angels;* but it might stand as a sort of general verdict upon every sheet of MS. that left his desk. His Irish History he remodelled, and to a great extent re-wrote, like the *Epicurean* and *Lalla Rookh,* five or six times, and even then he sent it off to the printer with a critical malediction upon its head. "The fact is, in a work of this kind, one ought to write it entirely through *first* (in order to become a master of the subject) and then begin *de novo.*" He spoke of his sketch of his Irish hero in almost the same terms. It had lingered on hand, like everything else he did, much longer than he anticipated; and, of course, had grown under his hands longer than he intended it to be. "This (he says) is all owing to the slowness of my execution. I see rapidly how the thing ought to be and how it will be, but to *make* it so is the difficulty. . . . . Nimbly as I can deal with *thoughts,* and rapidly as they present themselves to me, yet, until I can clothe them in *words* which satisfy me, I can seldom budge a single step." And

thus where Jeffrey and Sydney Smith dashed off an article for the *Edinburgh Review* in a couple of sittings, and sent the MS. to the printer without a second thought, trusting to the printer to puzzle it out as best he could, and to providence to make sense of it, Moore took a week to read up his authorities, a day or two more to sketch out a rough draft of his article, a day or two more to recast it, to polish and copy it out afresh, sent it off in a nervous fever, and even then scrawled interlineations and corrections all over the margin of his proof; for prose, as he says, gave him "a hundred times as much trouble in correcting as poetry did." Most of the proofs of his Irish Melodies were a terror to rattlesnakes; for even after all the trouble he took in polishing his verses as he composed them, he frequently left blanks for his adjectives, and in correcting the proof he recast couplet after couplet. "In order to give you a little idea of the difficulty I have in pleasing myself," he says, in returning to Power the proofs of four of his Irish Melodies, and four of the sweetest in the collection, "I have written down at the top of the proof as many of the rejected couplets as I could remember. They are not a third of those I have manufactured for the purpose; so you see I do not write songs quite as easily as our friend the knight (Sir John Stevenson) composes them." And this was the case with almost everything that Moore wrote. His polish and brilliancy were all the result of labour,

and generally, it may be said, of labour in contra-distinction to what is called inspiration.

Yet with all this labour and premeditation at his desk, Moore, at a dinner-table, was one of the aptest and pleasantest of companions, the epitome, as Byron said, of all that is exquisite in poetical or personal accomplishments. His flow of spirits, his happy application of humorous stories, his constant and congenial ease, have been noted in scores of diaries, and Luttrell touched off all his characteristics in an apt comparison of the poet to a glittering ball of quick-silver—always bright, always on the move,

"It still eludes you and it glitters still."

Moore's conversational powers were equal to those of any man in that brilliant circle of wits, politicians, poets, and critics which Lady Holland gathered together under the roof of Holland House; and perhaps no man of letters posssesed in a higher degree the talents of society which distinguished the author of *Lalla Rookh*. He could do everything, play, sing, dance, flirt, talk Platonism or persiflage with de Staël, Greek with Dr. Parr, German theology with Milman, politics with Brougham, scandal with Luttrell, metaphysics with Mackintosh, poetry or nonsense with Byron. He was one of the happiest of after-dinner speakers, and Sir Walter Scott thought him personally the most thoroughly gentleman poet he had come across. This, too, was the opinion of Lord

Holland; and I am not, I believe, throwing any slur upon Moore's contemporaries in saying that he was the only poet of his time, except, perhaps, Rogers, who was thoroughly at home in a London club or drawing-room. Byron acknowledged plainly that he had no taste for Society, and he made no attempts to cultivate it. His ideal of social felicity was a lobster supper with Sheridan or Colman. Scott was only at his ease with his dogs and a few friends on his native heath. In London he was a fish out of water. Southey all his life was a hermit—Wordsworth a dalesman in all the thoughts and habits of his life, and indistinguishable except in his poetry from any of his neighbours in the Westmoreland hills. Lamb was only at home with a pipe and a glass of gin and water in his Temple chambers, with a few choice spirits of his own selection, or with his tattered folios tilted up on the table before him. Coleridge was "all mist and haze, and never by any chance talked like folks of this world." Crabbe hardly ever opened his mouth except to yawn; and Bowles never except to be laughed at. To believe these men to be great poets or profound thinkers, you must keep your imagination under the illusion of personal ignorance. But with Moore this order of ideas was inverted. His personal friends, the friends who were in the habit of spending their days and nights with him, thought him a far greater poet, a much more apt and versatile man of genius, than it is possible for us to think him

to-day, now that we are able to follow him into his study, and to see him laboriously thinking out a dozen lines a day, writing and re-writing page after page of his prose, spending hour after hour in his garden preparing a ten minutes' speech, and, like Sheridan, pluming himself for conversation in the evening with as much care as he did for an article in the *Edinburgh Review* or a squib for the *Times*. The illusion in the case of Moore was personal; for out of his workshop no man seemed to give a more emphatic contradiction to the dictum that nature has set herself against pluralities in fame. Tom Moore was a pluralist of the first water in the eyes of all his friends, and it speaks suggestively for the general belief in his literary omniscience, that when he was deep in the mysteries of Irish antiquities, Bulwer Lytton was manœuvring to press him into the service of the *New Monthly*, upon any terms he thought fit to name, for an epigram or two a-month; the publishers of the *Edinburgh Review* were offering him £1000 a year to take Jeffrey's vacant chair; and the proprietor of the *Times* was tempting him, through Brougham, to enter the ranks of Printing House Square, as a leader-writer, at a salary of £100 a month.

In contradistinction, however, to the reputation of most of his contemporaries, Moore's was little more than a saloon reputation. It was, as long as it lasted, the most brilliant and flattering reputation of the

day; but it was a personal reputation, and like all personal reputations it has vanished into air with the disappearance from the scene of the last relics of the generation of men and women who, with all their admiration for *Lalla Rookh* and the Irish Melodies, thought Tom Moore personally as superior to his writings as he was superior in all the characteristic marks of a gentleman and a poet to his rivals. This is the Nemesis that waits upon all personal popularity, but of all the freaks of Fortune, the oddest is perhaps that by which the Poet of the Boudoir has in a single generation been reduced from the imperial rank which he held during his lifetime to that of an Irish song writer. This has been Moore's fate; and but for those sparkling and effervescent Irish Songs, which in his own day were set down as the trifles of his genius, the author of *Lalla Rookh* would to-day probably hardly keep his rank as a poet at all.

SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH.

ARE men generally greater or less than their works? That is to say, is the speech or the poem, the novel or the picture, the song or the criticism, superior or inferior to the man who made it? It is easier to ask the question than it is to answer it. And yet it is a question that must suggest itself to all of us in turn, as we take up the pleasantest of our companions—in calf or Russia—light our cigar and throw ourselves back in an easy chair with our feet on the fender, to enjoy a quiet hour's chat with Bacon or Montaigne, with Elia or Eöthen, with Scott or Thackeray, with Dickens, Ingoldsby or the poets, and try to spell out between the lines what manner of men these companions of ours were in the flesh to their own friends—what we should have thought of them if we had met them at dinner, over a rubber of whist, or in the smoking-room of the Garrick—what they thought upon the ten thousand topics of the day that men never write about, what were their tastes and habits, what wines they liked, what books they read, and how they wrote, whether they carried their MSS. about in their pockets, like Thackeray; altered and corrected, and re-wrote, like Dickens and Tennyson, or threw it off at a dash, and sent it to the printer

without a second thought or single erasure like Scott, and Byron and Shelley.

Of many of these men—of Shakespeare, and Bacon, and Milton, for instance—one may venture, I think, to say offhand, without a second thought, that it is impossible that any of them should have been superior to their writings, or that they should have been anything at all to their own friends, even in their best moments, what they are to us as Voices of the Air, because their writings bear in every line, not only marks of the file, but signs of keen self-criticism, of premeditation, and of deep thought. All that we know of Shakespeare from personal observation bears out Ralph Waldo Emerson in his opinion, that if we had happened to meet Shakespeare over a bowl of punch at the Mermaid, or in the course of a morning stroll on the banks of the Avon, we should not have been conscious of any deep inferiority—no, but of great equality—and that if we had read *Hamlet* or *Othello* by the light of our personal knowledge of the man we should probably have noticed nothing in either of the plays, but a strange skill in using and classifying his facts which we lacked. This, we know, was the case with Bacon and Milton. What did Sir Edward Coke or Burleigh think of the author of the *Novum Organum?* Or what did Elwood the Quaker think of the author of *Paradise Lost.*

And this is generally the case with men of pre-eminently thoughtful intelligence, or of poetic genius

of the highest order—that is, with men of the genius of Milton and of Wordsworth. You meet a shrivelled up little man, looking more like a walking Egyptian mummy than anything else, with an eye glistening like a topaz under a pair of beetle brows. He is too shy to speak to you, till you speak yourself, and even then keeps cautiously to commonplace, and talks only in monosyllables. And yet that man you find next day is one of the subtlest of English thinkers, and one of the richest, most musical, and varied of English writers. A slack, ill-dressed youth of four or five and twenty, with the manners of an attorney's clerk, and apparently in a consumption, is introduced to you as the author of a poem which might have been written by the Titans of antiquity. Or you read the writings of a man distinguished by the profusion of his invention, by the tenderness of his feelings, and the beauty of his language, and in your enthusiasm you plot and manœuvre to spend an hour or two in his society. You find him a blear-eyed, taciturn man of five-and-forty, as gaunt as a Highlander, and as reserved as a man contemplating suicide, a man whose conversation never rises beyond an intellectual h'm.

Yet these men are but types and representatives taken at random of the contrasts and contradictions that present themselves at every turn. The story of Charles the Second and the author of *Hudibras* is too trite for quotation; and yet that story is but a vivid illustration of a notorious and all but universal

fact. You can find no clue in a man's pictures or writings to his personal traits. What was once said of a powerful sovereign—that with a pen in his hand and a few minutes for reflection, he could very neatly counterfeit the language of a man of honour—may be said of nearly every man of genius. With a pen or brush in his hand he can counterfeit any style or character that he wishes to assume. Balzac and Dickens lived the life and thought the thoughts of all their creations in turn. Byron at his desk, with a bottle of Hollands and a pair of wax candles, was the antithesis of Byron at a lobster supper with Sheridan and Tom Moore, or at breakfast with Rogers. The Duke de la Rochefoucauld in his maxims ascribes every human action to selfishness of the grossest description. And yet it is notorious that the brutal cynic—at his desk—was personally one of the most generous and delicate of men. Chateaubriand with a pen in his hand was, as Louis the Eighteenth said, equal to an army of a hundred thousand men. But in the drawing-room of Madame de Staël he was simply distinguished by the gentleness of his manners and an air of effeminate languor. Salvator Rosa at his easel could find no vent for his wild and passionate genius, except by sketching scenes of brigandage and horror that make one's hair stand on end. But in private life he is said to have been one of the meekest of men. And look at Shelley. No man was more distinguished by his good breeding and

suavity than the author of the *Revolt of Islam*, and when all England was standing aghast at his most profligate poem, one of his companions tells us, in a phrase which might almost be stereotyped for men of his temperament, that he was the mildest and most tolerant of men, "and as perfect a gentleman as ever crossed a drawing room." The most grotesque of English humourists, a man who could not talk to you for ten seconds without throwing out some whimsical or witty observation, might have passed in Exeter Hall for one of the devoutest of City Missionaries. But, on the other hand, the most thoughtful and brilliant of the metaphysicians whose writings are the pride of "modern Athens," would beat Buckstone at his own weapons at a Theatrical Fund Dinner; and the gravest and most judicial of all modern writers upon Constitutional Law and History, a man whose works are all written in a State-paper style, was a man of the most sparkling intellect, a man whose spirits effervesced with wit, and repartee, and anecdote, and who, when he could contradict no one else, would throw open his window at two o'clock in the morning, with the toothache, to contradict the watchman on the state of the weather.

This is the rule. Of course it is not without exceptions. Here and there you may meet with a man who is as genial and witty over a glass of sherry as he is at his desk with a pen in his hand. Perhaps the most brilliant of these men was Burke. You could

not talk to him for ten minutes upon a doorstep, according to Dr. Johnson, without discovering him to be a great man, a man of rare endowments, and of still rarer acquirements, distinguished as much by the amplitude of his intelligence as by his powers of thought. Sir James Mackintosh spent two or three of the best years of his life in trying to refute the principles of Burke; and in the estimation of most of his friends, Mackintosh accomplished his task. Yet in half an hour's conversation in the colonnades of Beaconsfield, Burke refuted all his critic's refutations, and overturned all his political principles. Curran and Theodore Hook represent men of a very different type of genius. But, like Burke, these men were in their way super-excellent; and both of them are on all hands acknowledged to have been superior to their speeches and writings. "I have heard that man," said Byron, talking of Curran, "speak more poetry than I have ever seen written." Mr. Hall speaks in pretty much the same terms of the conversation and impromptus of Theodore Hook. He would sit down at a piano after dinner and string together a set of graceful verses sparkling with wit and humour of the highest order, and every verse perfect in construction and music. And with these I may class Miss Edgeworth. You might have taken down all her conversation in shorthand, and incorporated it in one of her novels without the slightest revision. It was superior to the best dialogue of her best works; and

Charles Lever says Miss Edgeworth was infinitely more gentle, more tender, more womanly than the sweetest heroine she ever drew. Every one who knew Sir Walter Scott, knew long before he avowed his authorship of the Scotch novels, that no one but the Ariosto of the North could have written them. And yet in these novels Scott, after all, hardly touched the subsoil of his genius. Neither Burns nor Byron ever put forth half his strength, or accomplished a tithe of what everyone believed he could do. It is impossible to lay down any of Thackeray's writings without feeling that in him, as in Scott, was an immense reserve of power. And what magnificent powers Coleridge frittered away upon trifles! None of these men in his writings rises to what you feel to be the full height of his intellectual stature. Pitt thought Sheridan a far greater man than Fox; and no one can turn from Addison and Swift to Pope, without feeling at once how infinitely superior they were in imagination, in humour, in mental grasp to the ugly little thing that asked questions, and wrote such brilliant epigrams and satires. But in talent as contra-distinguished from genius—that is to say, in those accomplishments which are formed and directed by habit to one sort of expression, as distinguished from a man's native endowments—Pope and Fox were as much superior to their rivals as those rivals were to them apparently in genius. Pope was inferior to his epigrams and satires. Fox was inferior to his

speeches. Sheridan, Swift, and Addison were themselves above the best of their speeches and writings.

Perhaps, however, of all the illustrations that can be given of this contrast between a man's talent, or his professional power, and his genius, is that which is presented by the Edinburgh Reviewers. These Uhlans of literature were the contemporaries of men of the richest and most varied genius in poetry, in art, in eloquence, and in the science of thought. And yet although, with one exception, none of them wrote anything that will outlive the next generation, they passed among their contemporaries, one and all of them, for men of the most brilliant gifts, and of the highest powers of mind. There was a sort of cavalier air about all of them, which left upon every one who read their essays and criticism an impression of power in reserve, which augured far better things than any of them ever accomplished, but which every one thought to the last they might accomplish if they only set themselves to work. They wrote well, and they wrote well upon the questions which were the topics of talk at the Clubs, in the smoking-room of the House of Commons, in every Court of Quarter Session, in every Chapter House, and at every dinner-table. They spoke well at the Bar, and in the House of Commons. They talked well, and talked upon every subject, from metaphysics to French cookery. They were all keen-witted men, and they lived in circles where wit, and

eloquence, and repartee were the tests of a man's general powers. Measured by this standard, the Edinburgh Reviewers took the highest rank in the table of literary precedence among their contemporaries; and of all the Edinburgh Reviewers, none was more distinguished as a man, or, I may add, less as a writer, in the inner circle of the buff and blue than Sir James Mackintosh.

I called Macaulay the most brilliant success of the *Edinburgh Review*. Sir James Mackintosh was its most brilliant failure. Across a table he was the most thoughtful, most brilliant, and diversified of talkers. At Holland House, at Rogers's breakfast table, and at Bowood he put all his rivals into the shade. He knew everything. He had read everything. "His judgment on men, on sects, on books had been often and carefully tested and weighed, and had then been committed each to its proper receptacle, in the most capacious and accurately constructed memory that any human being ever possessed;" and, start what topic you might, he was ready at once with his criticism, his quotation, or his anecdote. His memory was in its extent, exactness, and promptitude the marvel of all his companions; and, till subdued by age and illness, Sydney Smith tells us, "his conversation was more brilliant than that of any human being I ever had the good fortune to be acquainted with. His memory (vast and prodigious as it was) he so managed as to make it a

source of pleasure and instruction, rather than that dreadful engine of colloquial oppression into which it is sometimes erected. He remembered things, words, thoughts, dates, and everything that was wanted. His language was beautiful, and might have gone from the fireside to the press." This is high praise from men like Jeffrey, Macaulay, and Sydney Smith, for these men were themselves the most brilliant, fertile, and suggestive talkers of a generation of wits and writers who plumed themselves more upon their conversational powers than upon anything else. But at their own table, with Jeffrey, Brougham, Smith, Macaulay, and Hallam, the most accomplished of talkers takes his seat below the salt with Allen, and Horner, and Elmsley. You cannot lay your hand upon a single thing that Sir James Mackintosh did that could not have been better done by a man far inferior to him in genius. He wrote upon law, upon philosophy, upon metaphysics. He wrote poetry. He wrote history. He wrote criticism. He was a statesman, an orator, a judge. And yet with all this, and with all the reputation which he possessed in Westminster Hall, in the House of Commons, in every literary and philosophical *salon* in London and Paris, and in the metaphysical circles of Edinburgh, he has done nothing, or next to nothing, to justify in the eyes of posterity the apparently superstitious veneration with which most men of culture were in the habit of thinking and speaking of Sir James

Mackintosh, when the Edinburgh Reviewers began to cultivate literature on a little oatmeal in Craig's Court. He was the most striking example in the ranks of the Edinburgh Reviewers of a man whose talents, to use his own phrase, were below his genius. All his companions were inferior to their writings and speeches, all, that is, except Sydney Smith. Mackintosh was superior to his. "You must write three vols. quarto," one of his friends once told him when he was talking of that work on politics and morals which he held to be the final cause of his existence. "You *must* write three vols. in quarto. You only want this to be called the greatest man of your time. People are all disposed to believe everything we say of you, but I think it unsafe and indecent to put you so high without something in quarto." But of course these three vols. quarto were never written. Sir James spent half his life in talking about writing them, in telling his friends how, and when, and upon what questions he meant to write them, what his thoughts were, and what views he intended to take. But when, almost at the close of his career, Madame de Chatenay asked him, in Paris, the severe question, "What are the works by which you have gained so high a reputation?" Sir James tells us with characteristic frankness that he was obliged, as usual, to fall back upon his projects, to tell her what he meant to do. And in this way all his life was frittered away. It was a life of projects. "He is the only Scotchman I know," said Lord

Holland, "who feels the delight of lounging;" and Sir James Mackintosh passed all his life in lounging. To him life was from its outset to its close one long day-dream. He was always building castles in the air, always planning, always preparing; but, like Coleridge, never doing anything else—never, that is, attempting with a set purpose to put his soul into a single work, and to accomplish what, with a little industry, a man of half his powers ought to have accomplished, and what, with a little concentration of thought and will, a man of Sir James Mackintosh's powers might have accomplished with ease.

This fastidious volatility of purpose, this indeterminate tone of mind, and this tendency to dissipate all his thought upon the chimeras of his imagination, instead of toning down his imagination and his intellect to the task of the day, and working that out before he even allowed himself to think of anything else, marked him all through his life. You may trace all these traits in him even as a boy. He preferred every book except his school books; and his highest delight was to pore over "Plutarch's Lives" and the "History of Rome" when he ought to have been thumbing his Latin Grammar, or working out a problem of Euclid, and to fancy himself Emperor of Constantinople, distributing provinces and high offices of state among his school-fellows. And the boy was father to the man. The task of the day, whatever that task might be, was an irksome

task. His heart was anywhere and everywhere but where it ought to have been. At Edinburgh his inattention to the study which ought to have been uppermost in his thoughts, was so flagrant that he acquired the title of an honorary member of the classes. His highest distinction and his greatest pride here was to play the part of President of a Society formed out of all the speculative, lazy, and factious spirits of the University, and as the President of this Royal Medical Society to harangue by the hour upon the highest questions of science, when, if put to the test, he would have been puzzled to tell bark from James's powder, or to distinguish pleurisy from dropsy in the sick-room of a patient. In London he took four or five years to consider whether to be a man of letters or to follow his profession as a physician. He was both by turns, and neither for two days together. He drifted into law as he had drifted into physic and letters; and when at the highest point of professional success, at a point which in a few years might have placed him on the Bench as Lord Chief Justice of England, he threw away all his chances, under the temptation of a baronetcy and £20,000 a year, in order to get a little more leisure than he thought consistent with the life of a practising barrister in Westminster Hall, to write his book on metaphysics. But when he had purchased his leisure, he did nothing with it. He spent all his spare time in India dawdling over books,

feeling his pulse, collecting a vocabulary of the Indian dialects, learning Sanscrit, and in dreaming by turns of the triumphs that he had missed in the House of Commons, of the lettered ease that might have been his in a chair of moral philosophy in a Scottish university, of the honours that he might have won had he stuck to literature as a profession, and of the glory which he might still acquire as the lawgiver of Botany Bay. Sir James Mackintosh was intended by Nature for a recluse in a Scottish university, with nothing but books and professors of moral philosophy for his companions; and although the chances are ten to one that even there he would have done nothing but loiter about the cloisters with a book in his hand, plan courses of study, and talk about the works in three volumes quarto that he meant to write when he had concluded this or that course of reading, and when he had mastered this or that language, that is the only lot in life where a man of his temperament was likely to do anything more than Sir James Mackintosh did. Fate made him a physician, a lawyer, a politician, and a man of letters. But all through life his instincts rebelled against the position in which at any moment he happened to find himself, and it was not till he had failed as a lawyer, failed as a physician, failed as a politician, missed the cap and gown of a professor in Edinburgh, and discovered his whole life to be a mistake, and that it was now too late to attempt to

retrace it, that he took up his pen to write critiques for the *Edinburgh Review,* history for Dr. Lardner, and metaphysical discourses for the "Encyclopædia Britannica."

This taste for metaphysics was the only touch of the Scotchman that you could trace in Sir James Mackintosh, except perhaps, his dialect; and that, in Sir James Mackintosh, was only one degree less pronounced than it was in the rest of the Edinburgh Reviewers. It was a taste formed in early life, from the chance perusal of an odd volume of Dr. Priestley's, that had found its way into the collection of tattered folios which constituted the library of the old manor house on the banks of Loch Ness, where Mackintosh spent the first years of his life; and it may be said to have formed one of the strongest of his passions, for it survived all the dreams of his youth, all the illusions of his manhood; and the hope of writing a work that might take its place by the side of Dr. Priestley's was the last of his projects to be abandoned. At fourteen he set all his schoolfellows at Fortrose by the ears in a controversy upon the mystery of Free Will and Selection; and the pertinacity with which he took the anti-Calvinistic view of the question won for him the reputation of being "the boldest heretic in the county." This reputation accompanied him to college, where he was soon known as one of the most convivial and controversial of companions. Here he met Robert Hall,

the eminent Baptist preacher; and although no two men could be more opposed in temper and genius than the dashing Troubadour and the close and thoughtful student who regulated even his tastes by his conscience, the turn for metaphysics which they possessed in common bound them together in the closest bonds of friendship. They met together at five o'clock in the morning to read Greek plays, were known to all their college companions by the nicknames of Plato and Herodotus, and were in the habit of strolling out arm-in-arm, at the close of the day, to the sea-shore, or to the picturesque scenery on the banks of the Don, to discuss the knottiest points they had met with in the course of their day's reading of Berkeley or Butler; for, with all his apparent carelessness, Mackintosh was all his life a hard reader, hardly ever without a book in his hand, and his highest ambition when he left college was, as he tells us, to be a bookseller in London, "conceiving that no paradise could surpass a life spent among books, and diversified by the society of men of genius." He abandoned this dream upon a hint from a son of earth that a bookseller who wished to attend to his business had no time to read any book except his ledger; made up his mind to study medicine; studied that as he studied everything else which was not taken up on the impulse of the moment, just enough to gain his diploma and nothing more, frittering away much of his time upon politics, and literature, and

Brunonianism, and acquiring the title of an honorary member of the classes by his irregular attendance. Starting off to London with his diploma, a dress coat, and a few pounds raised by mortgaging his patrimonial estate, Mackintosh married a girl without a penny in the world—a sister of Dan Stuart, the editor of the *Morning Post*, whose portrait Charles Lamb has sketched in one of his essays—dashed into politics and society, wasted his money and his time, and, at his wits' end, planned a visit to St. Petersburg to make his fortune, abandoned that to write a book on insanity, apropos of George the Third's illness, postponed this to canvass Westminster for Horne Tooke, and in the end published a pamphlet instead, in support of Fox's theory of the constitutional demise of the crown. This pamphlet, it is said, won a pat on the shoulders from the Regent, but it did nothing more; and after spending his patrimony in search of a practice in Bath, Salisbury, and Weymouth, and in a visit to Brussels, he returned to London without a penny in his pocket, to write letters to the newspapers upon French politics, and to superintend the foreign news of the *Oracle* at a guinea a column. One week he is said to have earned ten guineas at this work, and the proprietor, protesting that no paper could stand such expenses as that, at once put Mackintosh on a salary. Upon the strength of this salary Mackintosh gave up his profession, retired with his wife to a cottage at Ealing,

read up for the bar, and, at the request of a bookseller, wrote, for a fee of £30, his reply to Burke's lightning flash of spleen and satire upon the French Revolution.

This was the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*. It was written in haste, and written, so far as I can see, with no higher object than to put a few guineas into the author's pocket. But it was an eloquent and polished piece of writing, striking out with intelligence and precision a theory of revolution which most of the Liberal politicians of the day were themselves groping after in a hazy and indistinct sort of way, to avoid Burke, on the one hand, and Tom Paine on the other. It was an arrow shot from the undistinguished crowd; but the precision and vigour of the archer were too striking to pass without observation. The arguments, illustrations, and retorts of the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* were at once in all mouths, were discussed at every dinner-table, in every newspaper, and in the House of Commons; and within six weeks of its appearance the author was one of the lions of the town, petted and flattered by every Whig orator and statesman in Parliament as the only man who could meet Burke with his own weapons, and acknowledged even by Burke to be a scholar and a gentleman, who could advocate what he thought freedom in others without madly assaulting the foundations of our own.

This was a splendid hit—a hit which threw open

to a young Scotchman of six-and-twenty, who hardly knew where to turn for a guinea to pay the rent of his cottage, except by writing squibs for a newspaper that no politician of the slightest position would touch with a pair of tongs, the saloons of all the highest of the Whig aristocracy; and upon the strength of this hit, and the spare cash which it put into his pocket, Mackintosh set to work as vigorously and systematically as it was in his nature to set to work with anything, to study the mysteries of special pleading, ekeing out his income as so many men of genius had done before, and have done since, by the labours of his pen. He wrote the famous "Declaration for the Association of the Friends of the People;" and under the auspices of this association, addressed a letter to Mr. Pitt, in the style of Junius, upon his abandonment of the question of Parliamentary Reform. You may trace his fine Roman hand, too, in several of the volumes of the *New Monthly* about this period; and, in fact, it was through recognising his hand in a reply to the "Thoughts on a Regicide Peace" that Mr. Burke asked his physician to offer a seat in his carriage upon his next visit to Beaconsfield to his accomplished and chivalrous critic. Of course, long before this visit, the September Massacre had dispelled most of the illusions under which Mackintosh wrote his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* and had taught him, to use his own phrase, how much he had been the dupe of his own enthusiasm. But once under the

wand of the enchanter in the library of Beaconsfield, listening to Burke's eloquent denunciation of the apostles of atheism, of their anti-moral paradoxes, and their pernicious novelties, all Mackintosh's philosophy oozed out at the ends of his fingers, like Bob Acres' courage. "In half an hour's conversation," as he afterwards acknowledged, "Burke overturned all the reflections of his life;" and to the day of his death Mackintosh treasured up every incident of his visit, and talked of them with rapture,—of Burke rolling about the carpet with his children, pouring out in his gambols the sublimest images, mingled with the most wretched puns, of the glee with which he entered into all their sports, of his thought and eloquence in conversation, of his affection for Fox, and of his vehement aversion for those theories of "pure defecated atheism" which, as he thought, were intended to corrupt all that is good in man, to eradicate his immortal soul, to dethrone God from the universe. "You, Mr. Mackintosh, are in vigorous manhood," said Burke, with his hand on his shoulder, at parting. "Your intellect is in its freshest prime, and you are a powerful writer. You shall be the faithful knight of the romance. The brightness of your sword will flash destruction on the filthy progeny of this mother of all evil."

To give a commission like this to a man of Mackintosh's calibre was like planting an oak in a flower-pot. It was like the commission of the ghost to

Hamlet. It was too much for him to bear. But the words sank deep in his mind; and the ardent young Scot returned to the serenity of his "black letter neighbourhood" in the purlieus of Lincoln's Inn Fields, to meditate how he could best defend the foundations of society against the brood of abominable and pestilent paradoxes which were assailing them, and conclude a treaty of peace between the worlds of speculation and practice. The result of his meditation was his lectures, in the Hall of Lincoln's Inn, on the Law of Nature and of Nations. Of these lectures hardly a scrap now remains beyond the Introductory Discourse; but if they were equal to the preface—and all the accounts that we have of them seem to prove that they were—they deserved much of the popularity which they attained. At this time Mackintosh was generally acknowledged to be the most thoughtful and brilliant young man to be found in the Inns of Court. He was tall and handsome, with a splendid head, a sparkling eye, a powerful voice, an ample command of a rich and high-sounding vocabulary, and a vehemence of spirit that produced half the effects of the highest gift of eloquence; and with an audience before him comprising many of the first men in Parliament and in the Courts of Westminster, Canning, Grant, Lord Minto, Lord Holland, Scarlett, and Percival, and with flattering letters of congratulation in his pocket from the Premier, the Chancellor, and many of the most

eminent men of his day, the orator put his whole soul into his task, tore the French philosophy to tatters, and constructed afresh, on stronger foundations than it had hitherto rested, the true philosophy of morality and politics, by taking to pieces the principles of our conduct in order to display in a stronger light their use and beauty, and exploring the codes of nations for those treasures of reason which must have been deposited by that vast stream of wisdom which for so many ages has been flowing over them. And in mixing up this sparkling julep, as Hazlitt called it, "to scour away the dregs and feculence and peccant humours of the body politic, Mackintosh seemed to stand with his back to the drawers in a metaphysical dispensary, and to take out of them whatever ingredients suited his purpose." His memory was prodigious; and in illustrating his points, he laid every literature of Europe under contribution. But as he afterwards acknowledged, his abhorrence of those patricians of sophistry and robbery, of whom the *noblesse de la robe* were doctors of rapine, and the *noblesse de l'epée* the heroes of the September massacres, the opinions of those who were gathered around his chair, his thirst for applause, and his repentance for former errors carried him away "in the rebound from his original opinions too far towards the opposite extreme." "He grew wanton with success. Dazzling others with the brilliancy of his acquirements, dazzled himself by the admiration they

excited, he lost fear as well as prudence, dared everything, carried everything before him. The modern philosophy, counterscarp, outwork, citadel, and all, fell without a blow"—by the whiff and wind of what Hazlitt calls his fell doctrine—and fell as if it had been a pack of cards. "The volcano of the French Revolution was seen expiring in its own flames, like a bonfire made of straw. The principles of reform were scattered in all directions like chaff before the keen northern blast. He laid about him like one inspired. Nothing could withstand his envenomed tooth. Like some savage beast, got into the garden of the fabled Hesperides, he made clear work of it, root and branch, with white foaming tusks—

"Laid waste the borders, and o'erthrew the bowers."

The havoc was amazing. The desolation was complete. As to our visionary sceptics and philosophers, they stood no chance with our lecturer. He did not carve them as a dish fit for the gods, but hewed them as a carcase fit for hounds."

That he went a little too far in this he afterwards confessed, with the frankness which formed one of the most striking and characteristic of his traits. But even in the first flush of his reactionary eloquence, when standing in the hall of Lincoln's Inn in a white sheet to recant the generous errors of his youth, with a host of chairmen of Quarter Sessions

and Tory Squires to cheer him, with a Tory Premier listening at the door for a sentence that might justify him in offering the penitent an appointment of £5,000 or £6,000 a year, and with a Tory duchess of the most fascinating type tapping him on his shoulder with her fan to seduce him from his Whig associates, Mackintosh was able to boast years after, when reviewing the fluctuations of his political thought, that he never for a moment relapsed into slavish principles, never fell into any doctrines adverse to the free exercise of reason, or to the liberty and improvement of mankind. But this is all that can be said. Whigs and Tories were alike mystified by his vehement vacillation, and both in turns flattered and cajoled him. But in those social circles where genius was the only password, where every man was welcomed if only distinguished by wit, or eloquence, or good fellowship, Mackintosh, with his high spirits, his fluent tongue, and his apt recollections, carried everything before him. He was the life and soul of "the King of Clubs," and it is impossible to turn to any volume of the memoirs of that period without finding expressions of admiration at the originality, dash, and eloquence of the enthusiastic and volatile Scot, who, in an odd sort of way, combined a love of black letter literature and metaphysics with the tastes of a *bon vivant* of the first water. These lectures gave him a *prestige* in his profession as a constitutional lawyer, which was

probably equal to £500 a year to him at once. He was consulted upon every question of Parliamentary and constitutional law, upon every question affecting the rights of belligerents and neutrals. The Emperor Alexander asked him to assist his Chancellor in the work of digesting the Ukases of Russia into a code of laws for the government of his Empire; and as a piquant illustration of the versatility of his reputation, I may add, that almost concurrently with this, the booksellers of London clubbed together and asked him to edit a new edition of the English poets, which was perhaps at that time the highest compliment that the booksellers could pay to a man of genius. His speech at the trial of Peltier for suggesting the assassination of the First Consul in an ode, placed him at a bound in the first rank of the orators of Westminster Hall. It was the most sensational speech of the day, and Erskine, in pronouncing it a splendid monument of genius, learning, and eloquence, only condensed into a sentence the compliments which were showered upon its author from the Bench, the Bar, and the Press. It is no exaggeration to say, that after that speech Mackintosh might in six months have been the equal as a professional advocate of the ablest and most accomplished men then at the Bar.* He was making £1,200 a year, even as it was.

Yet the echo of his voice had hardly died away in the rafters of Westminster Hall, when it was whis-

pered that he had abandoned all thought of rivalry with Erskine and Scarlett for the knighted indolence of India, that he had compromised with Fortune for £10,000 a year and a pension as Recorder of Bombay, that he was collecting all the books he could find upon India, upon morals and philosophy; and that he intended to devote the rest of his life to the intellectual asceticism of metaphysics, with a complete set of the schoolmen for his companions. "Experience," he said, in explanation of this apparently suicidal step, "has repressed my ambition, and the cares and duties of a family oblige me to seek the means of providing for them in other climates.

'Subiit deserta Creusa,
Et direpta domas, et parvi casus Juli;'

and reason informs me that there is no country in which I may not discharge a part of the debt which I owe to mankind." This was Mackintosh all over. Life in Westminster Hall was too busy and too bustling for him. London society was too trifling. He wanted to be independent of all the petty and grovelling cares of life. He wanted to live a life of luxury, of quiet, of ease, to live in a world of his own, with his books and his wife for his only companions. He wanted to write a book which should place him on a level with the philosophers and sages of old. But no man knew himself and his own tastes less than this restless recluse. He had not crossed the

line before he began to suspect that he had made a mistake; and the instant he set foot on the shores of Bombay, and found what sort of a life he had doomed himself to in this obscure corner of India, he was convinced of the fact. He shuddered at the prospect. "All society in India is not worth one afternoon of free and rational conversation at the King of Clubs." "It is all a cheat. I should rather travel to the Temple, and there try to keep Porson quiet for a week, and make a voyage down the Thames to force my way into Jeremy Bentham's, in Queen's Square Place. These are monsters enough for me; and fierce as one of them is, they suit me much better than Mullahs or Pundits." "Miss no opportunity," he says to all his friends, "in writing me very long letters, and sending me very large packets of newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, &c., of what you think trash in London. No memorial of the world in which we have lived is trifling to us." All this, of course, is very natural, and recollecting what life in Bombay must have been when Mackintosh took up his quarters there, how utterly vapid and stupid it must have appeared to a man who had been accustomed to the brilliant contests of the flower of English wit and of English culture, to the crowded courts of Westminster, and to the oratorical tournaments of St. Stephen's, we can easily imagine with what sickness of heart he contrasted his lot in India with that which he had

thrown away as too trifling in England. To see monkeys put through their tricks by a man from Ougein, to spend an hour in conversation with a Roman Catholic bishop from Modena, or with an Armenian priest from Mount Ararat, or with the Dustoor of the Parsees from Surat, were events to be treasured in his memory now as incidents of the highest interest; and when in the course of a single session he was called upon to sentence a man to stand in the pillory at Ahmedabad, to settle a quarrel in Cutch, to investigate a tippling score at a dram shop in Poonah, and to grant a commission to examine witnesses at Cambay, the business of his court was supposed to be in a very active and flourishing state.

Of course, to a man seeking retirement and leisure to meditate a great work, associations of this description ought to have been no more than those of an English village in the wolds of Yorkshire; and within his own house no man could have been more happily placed than Mackintosh was at Sarell. He had one of the pleasantest country houses in the island, standing in the centre of a park stretching as far as the eye could reach, with a saloon for his library overlooking a garden as rich and diversified as Nature could make it with fountains and flowers. He had all the books and materials for his work at hand, and he had as much leisure as the idlest of men could wish for. Yet month after month passed

away in this luxurious retreat, a retreat that a Sybarite might have envied, and nothing was done. "On court days, which are about one in four," he says, sketching his life in a note to one of his friends, "I go to Bombay, distant about five miles; on other days read, lounge, sometimes write, and, alas! oftener loiter away the forenoon in the really beautiful apartments that contain my library; dine at four; from half-past to seven walk on the terrace and walks of this noble house and gardens; drink tea at seven, and from seven till bed-time, which is ten, read to our whole family party." Now and then he made a dash at the schoolmen, or at Kant and his companions in the mystery of German philosophy, and read and wrote ten hours a day with the thermometer in the nineties, till his eyes were all bloodshot and his head almost addled. But these spasms of industry were few and far between; and after all they were but spasms. To-day he puts off his work till he has mastered the theoretical morals of the Germans, or till he has formed a comparative vocabulary of the Indian dialects, or till the next rains, "which will put an end to exercise for three months," or till he has read Reinhold's *Critique on Practical Reason,* or his *Metaphysics of Ethics and of Jurisprudence,* or Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologo-Politicus.* But the books are read, the monsoon passes, and still nothing is done. Thus year after year passes away; and every now and then, in his letters and

diary, you find explanations, promises, self-reproaches. "I have nothing here, it is true, to divert me from the execution of my plan. But I have very little to animate and support me during the work." "My books are, alas! still projects. Yet what shall I say for myself? My petty associations, too minute for description, and too fugitive for recollection, are yet effectual interruptions of meditation." This is at the end of his second year. In the third he grows still more desponding. "October 24 (1807) completed the forty-second year of a life of projects and inactivity;" and, before the close of the year, his work on *Morals and Politics* disappears from his diary and correspondence, and is replaced by a fresh project, that of re-writing the *History of England since the Revolution.* Abandoning his work on *Morals and Politics,* he lost heart, gave up reading everything except the papers and magazines that the English packets brought, spent most of his spare time in lounging about his rooms, looking at his books, and thinking how they must soon exchange their present gilded saloons for a dingy back parlour in Soho; and in making excursions to the caves of Elephanta, visiting the Courts of the Rajahs, collecting manuscripts, learning Sanscrit, and spelling out the writings of Zoroaster. He grew more and more dissatisfied with himself, with his projects, and with his life. "My life flows by and I am determined to do something. I am therefore resolved on going

home, with a view of exerting myself most actively in public life, if I am thought worth a seat in Parliament; or devoting myself to profound retirement and intense study, if the doors of St. Stephen's are barred. I have hitherto been neither a man of action nor speculation; but have been too much divided between them to allow myself a fair chance in either."

Returning home, Mackintosh spent most of the long mornings of his voyage in sketching the outline of his historical project, flattering himself first of all into a fit of industry with the picturesque conceit that a cabin nine feet square in a merchant ship, manned by Mahommedan sailors, on the coast of Malabar, was, if not a convenient, at least a characteristic place for beginning the history of a maritime and commercial empire, in dreaming of the achievements that even yet might be in store for him in the House of Commons, in feeling his pulse to find how many degrees his spirit had sunk in the course of his residence in India, in analysing his emotions, and reflecting upon his position now, with a scanty stock of fortune, health, and spirits, scribbling to kill his thoughts, in the cabin of a merchantman in the Indian Ocean, and that of the man whom he had met on equal terms and with equal prospects a few years before, on the trial of Peltier—Mr. Percival, now Prime Minister—and meditating how he might yet redeem the hopes that gilded the dreams of the

author of the *Reply to Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution.* Even then the note of credit which he had been allowed to draw on the future had not been exhausted; and Mackintosh had hardly been on English soil four-and-twenty hours before all the Whigs and Tories were asking themselves whether the author of the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* had returned as one of themselves or of their opponents.

The Premier, Mr. Percival, at once offered him a seat in the House, with "all the usual compliments and insinuations of future advancement." The Prince Regent stopped him the first day he appeared at Court and offered him the Stuart Papers, which he had just picked up as a bargain from an Italian monk, to assist him in his history, and talked to him so long and so graciously that the whole circle stared. Lord Cawdor offered him a seat in the ranks of the Opposition for Nairnshire; and Jeffrey in one of those flattering notes which he knew so well how to write, asked him to honour the *Edinburgh Review* with a contribution from his pen upon any subject that might be floating in his thoughts; to take his own time about it, and to recollect that the regular pay of the *Review* was twenty guineas a sheet, but that he possessed a *carte blanche* as to remuneration, and should not think of placing a man of Sir James Mackintosh's genius and accomplishments among his rank and file. Sir James was in a position to make his own terms with either party in entering Parlia-

ment; for he had taken such an independently erratic and original course that he might without inconsistency throw in his lot with either the Government or the Opposition. But he stuck to his old friends, and took his seat in the second row of the Opposition when, with hardly a word of criticism, he might at once have taken his seat on the Treasury benches as President of the Board of Control, with a salary of £5,000 a year. The Whigs hailed his appearance in the House of Commons with the highest delight. Testing him by his writings and his lectures, they believed that in him they had acquired a thoughtful and brilliant debater and an able man of business; and when he first rose to address the House, he was received with that respectful attention, but at the same time with that keen and jealous criticism, with which the House of Commons invariably listens to men who have won their reputation by their tongue or their pen outside its own walls, and enters these walls, as Sir James Mackintosh did, to win fresh laurels. He was no longer a young man. He could hardly now be called a handsome man. He looked like a valetudinarian, and he talked like a metaphysician. Tall, gaunt, without a single touch of grace in his action, he talked for two hours at a stretch upon the general principles of the question in a slow, measured, and monotonous voice, with a strong Scotch accent, varied by nothing but a shriek or a shout at the top of his voice, and the waving of

a couple of very long arms, very much in the style of Grattan. He looked worn and haggard. His hair was thickly sprinkled with grey, and he had the look of ill-health. His style, too, was too made and fine. It had too little nature, too little life and vivacity, to hit the fancy of an assembly accustomed to that short-hand style of hint and allusion, of brilliant invective, of frank impertinence, and audacious repartee, which marks the debaters of the House of Commons. "He often spoke over the heads of his hearers—was too much in advance of feeling for their sympathies, and of reasoning for their comprehension. He began too much at the beginning, and went too much to the right and left of the question, making rather a lecture or a dissertation than a speech." Thus it soon became an understanding in the House that Sir James Mackintosh was only a sort of *Deus ex machinâ,* to be brought out on full dress debates, and to be brought out before dinner to open the ball, but too profound and too clever by half for the rough and ready work of the House.

He took the hint; and although he had not the heart to abandon the House of Commons altogether, he gave up his house in London, and retired to a pleasant little country house in the Vale of Buckingham, to write the history which he had been gathering materials for with an industry which was of the highest service to Macaulay. His stock of materials for this work was of the richest and most

diversified nature. His collection of MS. authorities alone filled fifty vols.; and Macaulay says it was one of the noblest collections of extracts from public and private archives existing anywhere. But Sir James Mackintosh had neither the skill nor the industry to turn these materials to the uses which they were made to serve by the artistic perception and imagination of the man who took up his plan years after, and worked it out upon the lines which he had laid down, with a free use of the hints and materials which were to be found in his papers. Here, however, as in India, Mackintosh never could be brought to take up his pen with the stern resolution which was required by the work. He was always hankering after fresh materials, always discovering some other train of thought or inquiry that must be worked out first of all, to give him an accurate view of all the circumstances of the case. He rose with the sun, and generally spent his mornings in his library with a book and a cup of coffee, of which he was passionately fond, holding a whimsical theory that most of the differences in the intellectual powers of men arose from drinking coffee, like Voltaire; but most of these mornings at Weedon Lodge were spent, as those at Bombay had been, in looking through novels or rare editions of the classics, and over and over again, the hour for his ride or his walk overtook him at his old diversion of distributing the offices and provinces of the Empire of Constantinople,

over the pages of a black letter folio or an Elzevir, when apparently engaged in the most profound meditations.

Generally, too, when Mackintosh took up his pen he required the most profound quietness to write. But with all his love of stillness, he had a great aversion to being left alone at his desk. He always sent for Lady Mackintosh to come and sit down with him in his library when writing an article for the *Edinburgh Review* or a page of his history; but as the slightest movement, such as writing or working, broke the current of his thought, it was an understood rule that his wife was to take down a book and read it to herself. He wrote very slowly, and with constant revision and erasure, working out his thoughts with the utmost labour, and choosing his words with a precision which can only be called finical. He generally overdressed his thought; and, as he told one of his friends, his great difficulty with a pen in his hand was to find simple level phrases. His thoughts were apt to get upon stilts. He had an intolerable habit, too, of insisting that his friends should listen to what he had written; and often in the course of a stroll through the fields on a summer evening, you might see him dipping his hands into his coat pockets for a roll of MS. to ask your opinion, or upon his portrait of Pitt, or Fox, or Penn.

A disagreeable trait in any man, this habit in the case of a man like Sir James Mackintosh, must have

been doubling annoying; for, sparkling and suggestive as a talker, he was apt with a pen in his hand to be trite, flat, and trivial. Talking was his *forte*; and if you could only keep his hands out of his pockets in a stroll through the fields, over a cup of coffee at breakfast, or a glass of claret after dinner, you might listen to a stream of eloquent chit-chat upon men and books which was worth all his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*. The great thoughts and fine sayings of the great men of all ages were intimately present to his recollection, and ever dazzling out in his conversation. He recited, quoted, punned; he was full of life, full of thought, keen, chatty, and suggestive. He had read everything, and he recollected all he had read. It was all at call. His worst fault was, according to Macaulay, that he yielded too little to the impulse of the moment. "He seemed to be recollecting, not creating." He never appeared to catch a sudden glimpse of a subject in a new light. You never saw his opinions in the making, still crude, still inconsistent, and requiring to be fashioned by thought and discussion." You could not cry halves to anything that turned up while you were in his company. He anticipated your thoughts upon every topic. The instant a fresh question was started he was ready with his opinion; for his opinions were all kept wrapped up in silver paper in his memory, and the instant they were called for they were produced, unwrapped, and displayed with all their polish still

upon them. You might have printed a metaphysical argument from his lips, as Sir Henry Holland said, unaltered and complete. His conversation was all print. But with all his fluency and aptitude for talk, he was the only Edinburgh Reviewer who could tolerate any voice at table but his own. He was the only good listener of the set; and he cultivated this faculty to such a degree that he once listened to Dr. Parr talking politics for an hour, with nothing to mark his impatience but "a leer of assent." The man who could do this must have been a philosopher. It was the final test of his good nature. Addicted, too, to reasoning in the company of able men, Sydney Smith tells us that he had two valuable habits which are rarely met with in great reasoners. "He never broke in upon his opponent, and always avoided strong and vehement assertions." These are virtues which form an ample atonement for most of his faults as a writer and a Parliamentary speaker; and if Sir James Mackintosh had done nothing else but set a conspicuous example of these conversational amenities, he would not have lived quite in vain.

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